

**The Apostle of Capitalism:  
*The Economist* from 1843-1863**

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## ABSTRACT

For over 160 years, *The Economist* newspaper has been one of the most influential, sophisticated, and effective proponents of capitalism. It has consistently championed and conveyed a form of ‘humanitarian political economy’ to its weekly, global audience of professionals and business and government leaders. *The Economist* began in 1843 to campaign for free trade in agriculture and to advocate for the emerging regime of capitalism in Britain. Its primary concern during its first two decades centered on agricultural change. This thesis examines those first two decades, from 1843-1863, and *The Economist*’s focus on ‘improvement’, or capitalist development, in the English countryside.

*The Economist* was a staunch advocate for increased urbanization, private property, and ‘high agriculture’ – a modern system of agriculture that involved scientific techniques, free trade, large landholdings, and significant amounts of capital. It vehemently opposed any attempts to alleviate rural poverty using measures it felt were inconsistent with the principles of political economy and argued rural labourers would be better off if they were forced to sell their labour and submit to the discipline of the market. *The Economist* repeatedly portrayed this process of capitalist development as beneficial for all and as a natural occurrence, brought about through the free working of the market. Its account contributed to the prominent idea of the ‘success’ of British agriculture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century; an idea that has had profound effects on subsequent notions of development.

This thesis uses Marxist and Foucauldian concepts to demonstrate that the process of capitalist development in the countryside was not brought about through market forces. Extensive and often oppressive government intervention was needed to dispossess people from the land and to force them into waged labour. Though much of this dispossession had occurred by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, *The Economist* performed a crucial role in advocating for policies that cemented capitalist relations of production. *The Economist*’s most important

function was to spread belief in capitalism by making its inequality and poverty more palatable.

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## INTRODUCTION

“I used to think; now I just read *The Economist*.” – Larry Ellison, CEO, Oracle Corporation

“How did *The Economist* put it?” – Ronald Reagan, former U. S. president

“May be the most sensible publication in the English language.” – The New York Times<sup>1</sup>

From its inception in London in 1843, *The Economist* has been read by an influential, global audience of senior business, political, and financial decision-makers. For over 160 years it has been one of the most consistent, powerful advocates for economic liberalism. Today, over a million copies of *The Economist* are sold through subscriptions and newsstands each week in over 200 countries.<sup>2</sup> Despite its far-reaching influence, hardly any academic work has attempted to explore the newspaper’s impact.<sup>3</sup> The two most important studies of *The Economist* were a flattering centenary edition published in 1943 and an equally laudatory 1993 book on *The Economist*’s institutional history, paid for by the paper. In addition to these *Economist*-specific studies, a 1955 article by economist Scott Gordon in *The Journal of Political Economy* emphasized the valuable contribution *The Economist*’s first editors made to classical economics. Similarly, a 1960 dissertation explored the life and work of the paper’s founder and first editor, James Wilson. As well, a 2001 book by Charlotte Hooper

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<sup>1</sup> Endorsements, *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/>.

<sup>2</sup> *The Economist*, <http://ads.economist.com/>. In 2008 *The Economist*’s worldwide circulation was 1.3 million. [http://www.economistgroup.com/pdfs/2008\\_Annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.economistgroup.com/pdfs/2008_Annual_report.pdf), p. 5. Moreover, *The Economist* now includes *The Economist* Group – a brand family that has evolved into a global media company which “develops intelligent brands for a high-end audience.” [http://www.economistgroup.com/what\\_we\\_do/our\\_history.html](http://www.economistgroup.com/what_we_do/our_history.html). Since 1928, half of *The Economist*’s shares have been owned by the Financial Times, a subsidiary of Pearson, the other half by a group of independent shareholders. [http://www.economistgroup.com/what\\_we\\_do/editorial\\_philosophy.html](http://www.economistgroup.com/what_we_do/editorial_philosophy.html). In 2008 its operating profit was 44 million pound sterling. [http://www.economistgroup.com/pdfs/2008\\_Annual\\_report.pdf](http://www.economistgroup.com/pdfs/2008_Annual_report.pdf), p. 3. Advertisers covet positions in *The Economist* because of its editorial environment and global reach. Phil Sievers, senior vice president/management supervisor at Doremus & Company, which placed Bankers Trust advertising with *The Economist*, argued that “from an editorial standpoint, it may well be the best-written and best-edited English-language magazine in the world.” Lorne Manly, “Capital Gains. (The North American edition of *The Economist*),” *Folio: the Magazine for Magazine Management* 22 (8) (1993): 71.

<sup>3</sup> Although *The Economist* is now published weekly in a magazine format, it describes itself as a political, literary and general newspaper because it covers news, the main business and political events of the week, as well as analysis and opinion. Because of its editorial anonymity, references will refer to “*The Economist*”, “the paper”, or “it” rather than a human author. *The Economist*, [http://www.economist.com/help/DisplayHelp.cfm?folder=663377#About\\_The\\_Economist](http://www.economist.com/help/DisplayHelp.cfm?folder=663377#About_The_Economist) and [http://www.economistgroup.com/what\\_we\\_do/editorial\\_philosophy.html](http://www.economistgroup.com/what_we_do/editorial_philosophy.html).

included a case study of *The Economist* from 1989-1996, which examined how the paper constructed international relations as a masculine space.<sup>4</sup>

It was an interest in international development that led me to research on *The Economist*. Development, a widely used, commonly believed in, but scarcely understood term, often signifies one of humankind's most ambitious enterprises to eradicate worldwide poverty. While often thought of as a post-Second World War product, it was a set of 18<sup>th</sup> century European Enlightenment ideas that eventually coalesced into what is now called development: these ideas included a growing belief in science and its use to reshape the natural world as well as notions of progress, known in its earliest incarnations as 'improvement.' The Enlightenment has been recognized as a movement decisive in the making of modernity, in constructing what its philosophers believed was a superior social order.<sup>5</sup>

The key to linking order and progress, according to Enlightenment theorists, was to clear away constraining and confusing traditions and customs. As John Locke, the presiding spirit of the Enlightenment articulated, there was need for "clearing Ground a little, and removing some of the Rubbish, that [lay] in the way to Knowledge."<sup>6</sup> The way forward was through the application of reason to knowledge and laying sound foundations in scientific facts and figures. Deference to tradition was spurned as antiquated or backward by advocates of improvement, and agricultural, commercial, and industrial progress was held up as a source not just of profit but of civilization.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> A.H. Chapman, et al, *The Economist, 1843-1943: A Centenary Volume* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), Ruth Dudley Edwards, *The Pursuit of Reason: The Economist 1843-1993* (London: Hamish Hamilton Ltd., 1993), Scott Gordon, "The London Economist and the High Tide of Laissez Faire," *The Journal of Political Economy* 63 (6) (1955), James Ashby Moncure, "James Wilson and the Economist, 1805-1860" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1960), Charlotte Hooper, *Manly States: Masculinities, International Relations, and Gender Politics* (New York: Colombia University Press, 2001).

<sup>5</sup> Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), p. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Porter, p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> Porter, pp. 13, 40.



In the English countryside, no one seemed to exemplify an attachment to tradition more than those who relied on common land for subsistence. As a result, enclosures of the English commons and the denial of customary rights became synonymous with improvement. This merged with what became a common understanding of history by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century: that human development progressed through a series of ‘stages’, beginning with barbarism in an age without private property and ending with civilization in an age of commerce.<sup>8</sup> Enclosures thus became linked with civilization and the inviolability of private property was endorsed by Enlightenment writers such as John Locke and Adam Smith.<sup>9</sup> As the percentage of the population dislocated by enclosures increased, the perceived need to order society heightened. To control the threat of this new propertyless class and to turn them into wage labourers, the ‘discipline of the market’ was to be enforced. The evolving social order was represented by emerging regimes of capital and it was through the self-regulating, organizing miracles of the market that order, liberty, and prosperity were to be worked out. By the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the writings of the Reverend Thomas Malthus helped justify restricting assistance to the poor and the application of the discipline of the market to workers and peasants. Current ideas of development are a continuation of these earlier concepts of the proper means for ordering society. In a sense, development became the universalization of improvement.

*The Economist* was a powerful apostle of this ideology of improvement. It articulated and promoted a particular conception of progress, unleashed during the Enlightenment, which included a move toward industrial agriculture, a manufacturing population, and a respectable middle class. The paper was established, it maintained, to take part in “a severe contest between intelligence, which pressed forward, and an unworthy, timid ignorance obstructing

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<sup>8</sup> Murray G. H. Pittock, “Historiography,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 262 and C. A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: global connections and comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 299-300.

<sup>9</sup> Porter, p. 16.

our progress.”<sup>10</sup> It was the agricultural interest, which was most strongly protected by law that *The Economist* viewed as particularly obstructing progress. It argued that agriculture in Britain was afflicted with inefficient agrarian traditions; the land was encumbered with protections and restrictions. It claimed that agriculture was in need of liberation from these age-old, ‘unnatural’ constraints. Farmers and rural labourers, according to the paper, constituted a distinct caste, shut up in its own narrow sphere, profoundly ignorant of how the affairs of the world were carried on.<sup>11</sup> They were in a “behind-the-spirit-of-the-age state”; those who were still employed in the cultivation of the soil were “avowedly the most wretched and ignorant portion of [the] population.”<sup>12</sup> Throughout its articles, *The Economist* urged the elimination of any non-modern vestiges of traditional society and advocated the dispossession of those still clinging to small plots of land. It held out hope that the spread of reason would overcome what it felt were the limits of habit and ignorance. Each week the paper devoted a section to the topic of agriculture and employed the language and authority of political economy to advocate for its ‘improvement.’

This thesis examines *The Economist*’s first two decades, from 1843 to 1863. Drawing on research from the newspaper’s weekly section on agriculture, as well as any other articles within the paper pertaining to agriculture – in over 1,000 issues – this thesis contends that *The Economist* was obsessed with improvement, particularly when it came to the land and its labourers. This might seem to be a somewhat mundane contention, until we explore the contemporary meaning of the term ‘improvement.’ According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the word ‘improve’, from the 17<sup>th</sup> until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was often applied to the land and literally meant to do something for monetary profit, to increase something in

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<sup>10</sup> James Wilson, *Prospectus* [http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=1873490](http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=1873490). This phrase has been enshrined on the contents page of *The Economist* since 1991.

<sup>11</sup> “Helplessness and Hopelessness of the Anti-League Movement,” *The Economist*, January 20, 1844, p. 402.

<sup>12</sup> “Proposed College of Chemistry,” *The Economist*, August 3, 1844, p. 1061; “The Cultivation of Waste and Other Lands. Native Industry.” *The Economist*, December 28, 1844, pp. 1562-1564.

value.<sup>13</sup> In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the word ‘improver’ was firmly fixed in the English language to refer to someone who rendered land productive and profitable through agricultural innovations and by enclosure and cultivation of waste land. By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, agricultural improvement was a well-established practice, and by the 19<sup>th</sup> century scientific farming and productivity and profit were inextricably tied to the concept of improvement. Improvement became, in other words, a code word for capitalist farming.<sup>14</sup> For *The Economist*, improvement meant clearing away any old customs and practices that constrained profit or interfered with the most productive use of land. Thus ‘improvement’ – despite the modern connotations given the word – was not a benign process without casualties; *The Economist*’s campaign for improvement constituted an attack on all those obviously afflicted with old customs and practices, the majority of the rural ‘poor’.

Though from the late middle ages the system of property relations in the English countryside had been undergoing a profound change, the transformations in the social relations of production that were to become essential to a fully developed capitalism had not yet been completed by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Crucial changes such as the enclosure of common land, the concentration of landholdings, the separation of people from control of the means of production, the commodification of labour, and the emergence of the rural triad of landowner, capitalist tenant farmer, and wage labourer had been set in motion. Within this triad of rural classes a small number of landlords owned large amounts of land and on rare occasions also farmed it. They rented out their land to tenant farmers and exercised influence over them. Some tenant farmers became wealthy capitalists, farming substantial amounts of land. They were motivated by profit, produced mainly for the market, and employed rural

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<sup>13</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary* online, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), [http://dictionary.oed.com.cyber.usask.ca/cgi/entry/50113527?single=1&query\\_type=word&queryword=improvement&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10](http://dictionary.oed.com.cyber.usask.ca/cgi/entry/50113527?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=improvement&first=1&max_to_show=10), [http://dictionary.oed.com.cyber.usask.ca/cgi/entry/50113530?query\\_type=word&queryword=improvement&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&single=1&sort\\_type=alpha](http://dictionary.oed.com.cyber.usask.ca/cgi/entry/50113530?query_type=word&queryword=improvement&first=1&max_to_show=10&single=1&sort_type=alpha). Also see Neal Wood, *John Locke and Agrarian Capitalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), p. 58.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999), pp. 80-83 and Porter, p. 306.

labourers. However, at the time *The Economist* began publishing there were still numerous small-scale farmers who had rights to common land, had little capital, produced both for subsistence and for the market, employed family labour, and made non-market decisions regarding production.<sup>15</sup> Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many of these smallholders were dispossessed of land and converted into agricultural labourers. Landless labourers, deprived of their means of subsistence, were forced into poverty, becoming dependent on low wages as agricultural or factory workers. In this thesis I use small-scale farmers and agricultural labourers – those who were relatively independent of wages and markets and those who were dispossessed of land – to mean the rural ‘poor’. Their separation from their means of subsistence and acceptance of wage labour was neither complete nor as rapid as desired. Marxist theorist Rosa Luxemburg argued their self-provisioning “confront[ed] the requirements of capitalism at every turn with rigid barriers” that seemed unlikely to collapse on their own accord.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, more than the market forces of supply and demand were required to integrate the rural poor into the national economy; nonmarket forces were needed to clear away the ‘ignorance obstructing Britain’s progress’ and to speed up the process of capitalist assimilation in the countryside.<sup>17</sup>

### **Purpose and Argument**

*The Economist* argued Britain’s progress required vast changes in the countryside, including changes in the mode of agricultural production and a rational re-ordering of rural society. It maintained that market forces would naturally bring about a migration from the countryside to the city, a capitalist mode of agricultural production, and a population disciplined to the market. It confidently claimed that the agricultural population and all of Britain would benefit by these changes. *The Economist*’s account of these transformations

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<sup>15</sup> Michael Turner, *Enclosures in Britain 1750-1830* (London: Macmillan Press, 1984), p. 72.

<sup>16</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Accumulation of Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), p. 369. Michael Perelman in *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (London: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 93, refers to her work.

<sup>17</sup> Perelman, pp. 3, 100.

contributed to the prominent idea that the ‘success’ of Britain’s agriculture in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the country’s growing freedom and prosperity was the result of the victory of man over nature, of scientific agriculture over traditional farming, and of a modern society dominated by the market over other inefficient, backward forms. This concept of progress has had profound effects on subsequent notions of development.

Yet, *The Economist*, like the classical political economists, while claiming to be an uncompromising adherent to the values of laissez faire, faced a profound dilemma identified most famously by Karl Marx: while arguing that markets were the most efficient method for organizing production and claiming that wage labour came about in a natural manner, capitalism required extensive government intervention to uproot and dispossess people from the land, to enlarge farms, and to discipline labour. Marx labeled this brutal process of separating people from the means of providing for themselves and the accumulation of capital and wealth by a small sector of society as “primitive accumulation.” He argued that contrary to the claims of the classical political economists, the methods of primitive accumulation were “anything but idyllic.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, the process of forcible expropriation began in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as agricultural land in England was enclosed into private property. Throughout the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries brutal laws were passed against those who had been dispossessed of land, driven from their homes, and turned into beggars, robbers, vagabonds, criminals, urban poor, and ‘masterless men’. There were so many of them, they alarmed contemporaries and were seen as “potential dissolvents of the society.”<sup>19</sup> Beginning under Henry VIII in 1530

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<sup>18</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1. Translated by Ben Fowkes (New York: Vintage Books, 1977), pp. 873-895.

<sup>19</sup> Christopher Hill, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), pp. 39-40.

until the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many were executed or whipped, imprisoned, and tortured into accepting the discipline necessary for a system of wage labour.<sup>20</sup>

Michel Foucault maintained that while the “gloomy festival of punishment” had declined by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it survived “as a new legal or administrative practice”, or according to Peter Linebaugh, as “technological repressions” such as increased surveillance, policing, and the factory and wage system.<sup>21</sup> Thus, although some of the most draconian methods of primitive accumulation had occurred by the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the state continued to employ methods of primitive accumulation. This thesis argues *The Economist* played an essential role in advocating for policies that furthered the process of primitive accumulation, cementing capitalist relations of production. It performed a vital role in justifying these policies, despite the obvious misery they were creating. Indeed, *The Economist*’s most important task was to spread faith in capitalism and to make its inequality and poverty more palatable.

This thesis explores *The Economist*’s narrative of improvement; that is, its narrative of capitalist development. It attempts to explain the success of this narrative while shedding light on its contradictions and inconsistencies. It examines the government interventions required to bring about these improvements and contends they were intended to clear away barriers to the advance of capital. Given their social relations of production and independence from the market, the rural poor were a key barrier to capitalism and the injurious and impoverishing effects of these interventions were experienced primarily by them.

For *The Economist*, and many improvers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, improvement often began with nature. Related to an Enlightenment obsession with mastering nature, *The Economist* maintained that as society advanced it naturally progressed from an agrarian society that

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<sup>20</sup> See Marx, pp. 896-904, Hill, especially pp. 20, 39-56, Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged: Crime and Civil Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Verso, 2003), especially pp. 91, 111 and Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison* (New York: Vintage, 1979), especially pp. 3-103.

<sup>21</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 8, Linebaugh, p. 162.

obtained an easy subsistence and contented itself with few wants and much idleness to an urban, industrial society that controlled nature, overcame its limits, and prospered. The paper used environmental determinism – the theory that the natural environment strongly influenced people’s habits and human history – to justify a transfer of labour and wealth from the countryside to the city. It also advocated a transformation of the countryside through enclosures, deforestation, scientific experiment, and an improved private property regime. *The Economist* portrayed these changes as reasonable and good for the whole country: they alleviated the problem of ‘surplus’ labour in the countryside, improved agriculture, met the needs of a growing population, and generated economic growth.

But removing most of Britain’s food producers from the land at a time when it could no longer feed itself, encouraging further environmental degradation, and relying on imports from other parts of the world, was neither reasonable, beneficial for everyone, nor a natural occurrence. In order to recognize how the extensive changes *The Economist* advocated were carried out, I use James C. Scott’s concept of “high-modernism.” A high modernist ideology, Scott maintained, was a 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century faith in scientific progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature, and above all, the rational design of a new social order.<sup>22</sup> High modernism, however, even when its carriers were believers in the sanctity of market forces, required state action to sweep away barriers to capitalism. The establishment of towns, rural to urban migration, overseas extraction, and the extension of private property all required government intervention. As well, *The Economist*’s obsession with the collection of agricultural statistics indicated one of the ways in which state action would increase in the English countryside. It was through statistics that the rural population and their land use would be made available to the state. The legibility produced out of this knowledge would allow state officials to characterize the population in new ways,

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<sup>22</sup> James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 4, 89-90.

make them available to economic calculation, and expose remaining barriers to capitalism. From a description of the countryside, it was but a small step for the paper to advocate a new design for agricultural production, all with its improvement in mind.<sup>23</sup>

Changes in agricultural production were a key area in which transformations were needed in order to cement capitalist relations of production. *The Economist* was concerned with improving and increasing agricultural production, but only in certain ways. It was a passionate advocate of ‘high farming’ – a modern, industrialized, production and profit-driven system of agriculture. This system, according to the paper, relied on free trade in agriculture, huge imports of fertilizer, mechanization, and large landholdings that employed significant amounts of capital. High farming was clearly designed to dispossess the smallholders who lacked the means to farm ‘highly’. This capitalist mode of production limited access to land and separated the rural poor from their means of subsistence, forcing them to become wage labourers. Yet the paper argued that a capitalist mode of production came about naturally and would ultimately benefit the rural poor. Its contradictions became most evident in its vehement opposition to any measure, such as small garden allotments, that would alleviate rural poverty or lessen class differences in the countryside.

*The Economist* claimed that once people were ‘freed’ from their ties to the land they naturally sought to profit and to increase their own well-being. Rational people, it argued, understood the benefits of wage labour. The paper maintained the rural poor’s ignorance of their own misery and failure to conform to wage labour was evidence of their inadequate rationality and moral defectiveness. A labour force disciplined to the market did not, however, emerge spontaneously. Dispossession of land was necessary, but it was often not sufficient in harnessing the rural poor to the labour market.<sup>24</sup> Nor was it sufficient in constructing a common and rational consciousness on which the success of capitalism

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<sup>23</sup> Scott, pp. 92, 96.

<sup>24</sup> Perelman, p. 14.



depended; a host of disciplines designed to undermine resistance against the demands of wage labour were required. It was a function of the modern state to shape the mentality of the population as a whole in accordance with a predetermined model, and to instill the ideas and sentiments it thought desirable into the minds of all.<sup>25</sup>

It is here I use Michel Foucault's concept of "governmentality" to understand how the rural poor were to be integrated into the market economy. Foucault presented government as an 'art', as a way of acting on and governing the conduct of a population so as to shape, guide, and correct their actions. He argued this modern form of governance took shape in Western Europe between the late 16<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, becoming fully developed in the 19<sup>th</sup>. He maintained the state's increased concern with productivity and the well-being of the population was a central characteristic of the modern state; this approach differed from the state's earlier concern with controlling territory. Controlling people required more subtlety and discretion, thus governmentality, Foucault noted, was not imposed on a population, but was cultivated in people through particular 'disciplinary mechanisms' or 'techniques of government' which would instill self-discipline and construct 'proper' or 'good' citizens. It was not authority over people, but the fostering of their happiness, health, and prosperity that became the object of government.<sup>26</sup>

The rural poor's stubborn reliance on traditional solidarities, refusal to relinquish control of the organization of their survival, and their limited material needs made them incapable of being incorporated into a modern society dominated by the market. These characteristics also excluded them from being considered acceptable citizens.<sup>27</sup> They were thus in need of intervention and discipline to guide their conduct. *The Economist* worked in a

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<sup>25</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, 1858. *The old regime and the French revolution*. Translated by Stuart Gilbert (New York: Doubleday, 1955), pp. 159, 162. Cited in Perelman, p. 137.

<sup>26</sup> Michel Foucault, "Governmentality," in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 87-104.

<sup>27</sup> Giovanna Procacci, "Social economy and the government of poverty," in *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 151-168. Also see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: the political and economic origins of our time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944, reprinted 1957), p. 163.

governmentality fashion by promoting education, ‘decent’ homes, and a strict administration of the Poor Law as beneficial for the rural poor. These were techniques of government, spaces that would shape and transform the rural poor into governable citizens – citizens that could be integrated into a modern national economy. Nevertheless, it was not the rural poor who were *The Economist*’s audience; rather, it sought to convince those who read the paper, those with power – government and business leaders – of the need to stand firm, to not succumb to sympathy for the rural poor, and to work to ensure that they had no option but to embrace the new rationality of wage labour. *The Economist* hoped to restrict the rural poor’s ability to promote “counter-conducts”, as Foucault termed it, or different forms of behaviour that were not amenable to capitalist relations of production.<sup>28</sup>

*The Economist* repeatedly obscured the significant role of state power in capitalist development. It insisted that changes in the English countryside were voluntary, normal, a neutral affair, and a natural progression toward an advanced stage of civilization. By claiming that capitalist development benefited everyone, the paper made any opposition appear futile and foolish in the face of inevitable progress. In all, *The Economist* made an unnatural system seem natural. This position was essential to build support for capitalism; that this position could explain so much social injustice as an inevitable incident in the scheme of improvement, and that, as the paper argued, any attempts to change such things would likely do more harm than good, gave it authority.<sup>29</sup>

This thesis contends that *The Economist*’s vision of rural change required external and nonmarket factors: relief of land and resource constraints beyond Britain’s borders, increased state action in the countryside, and the techniques of government to form acceptable citizens. This thesis, therefore, illuminates the relationships of power built into the paper’s improvement discourse and illustrates the conditions and policies necessary for the emergence

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<sup>28</sup> Colin Gordon, “Government rationality: an introduction,” in *The Foucault Effect*, p. 5.

<sup>29</sup> Perelman, pp. 94, 309.

of capitalism. It maintains that the narrative of improvement and the story of modern progress was based on exploitations and injustices, experienced primarily in the countryside, that were fundamental to the development of capitalism. What follows is a brief history of *The Economist*, the historical context in which it was founded, and the method by which it was written.

### **A Brief History of *The Economist***

*The Economist*'s founder and first editor, James Wilson, was a hat maker who was greatly influenced by the works of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, and other classical political economists. At the base of classical economic belief lay the conviction that all benefited from free competition and that government interference in economic affairs upset the natural checks and balances of wealth creation. This laissez faire political economy, in contrast to the old 'moral economy' of regulation and ideals such as a just price and the proper reward for labour, laid claim to a superior rationale, to a scientific grasp of wealth creation and an endorsement of 'natural' economic forces. With its intellectual underpinnings in the Enlightenment, political economy rationalized self-interest and individualism; it legitimized a capitalist society in terms of human nature, desire, and individual freedom. Demonstrating how self-enrichment could be socially cohesive, political economy fused burgeoning capitalism and social order into a single discourse.<sup>30</sup>

According to Scott Gordon in his article, "The London Economist and the High Tide of Laissez Faire", the effort to disseminate the principles of political economy among the working classes began around 1820, mainly due to discussions over the Poor Laws and the growing trade union movement.<sup>31</sup> Wilson was disturbed by the growing interference of government: the Factory Act of 1833 and the Mines Act of 1842 which regulated hours of labour, the establishment of a central Poor Law Commission that would administer poor relief

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<sup>30</sup> Porter, pp. 386-396.

<sup>31</sup> Scott Gordon, p. 463.

under the New Poor Law of 1834 and, after 1839, the Privy Council Committee on Education, all increased the role of government.<sup>32</sup> After 1820, the nature of the political economist's argument was that, by protection, the agricultural classes benefited at the expense of other parts of the community, and the effort was made to show that this was illicit or unjust. As Wilson contended, "nothing [could] possibly be favourable to the whole that [was] detrimental to a part, and nothing [could] be detrimental to one portion that [was] favourable to another portion."<sup>33</sup> A clear economic theory became important in the argument that free trade would benefit everyone, including the agricultural classes.

Wilson joined the Anti-Corn Law League where he became known as a "great belief producer" after writing a pamphlet in 1839 on the *Influences of the Corn Laws* – essentially a plea for free trade.<sup>34</sup> Wilson quickly gained admirers and became sought after for counsel, however, it was primarily in print as a persuader and recruiter of influential people that he made his greatest contribution to the anti-Corn Law campaign.<sup>35</sup> In 1843 he stepped out on his own and began *The Economist* which would be of assistance to the League in influencing public opinion and forming a legislative party to pursue, first, repeal of the Corn Laws and, then, "the long train of measures and policy, necessarily involved in free-trade principles."<sup>36</sup>

*The Economist's* idol was Adam Smith and its ideology laissez faire. Wilson believed that once the principle of free trade had been established universally then progress and order would be continuous. In *The Economist* he argued that "laissez faire [was] the true and only policy" and not limited only to trade or business but applied to all human relations. It was, in

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<sup>32</sup> Moncure, pp. 118-119.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Dudley Edwards, p. 9. Also see Scott Gordon, p. 464.

<sup>34</sup> Dudley Edwards, p. 9. Sir Robert Peel quoted Wilson's *Influences of the Corn Laws* in the House of Commons and the *Leeds Mercury* published Wilson's pamphlet. The Corn Laws, established by Parliament in 1815, were restrictive measures that aided large British landowners who produced grain by taxing foreign grain imports. See Moncure, pp. 76-87, Bayly, p. 136 and Perelman, pp. 294-303.

<sup>35</sup> Wilson found it distressing to be associated with the Anti-Corn Law League whose supporters included the working-class Chartists, whose 'creeds and doings', according to one of his daughters, he considered near-criminal and inimical to progress. Wilson had a fear of extremism. So although he remained supportive of the League, his main work for the cause was conducted over dinners with public men or with his pen. Dudley Edwards, p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

other words, not merely an economic doctrine but a complete metaphysics, the foundation upon which all policy should be founded.<sup>37</sup> “The more we give or allow scope to the free exercise of self-love, the more complete will be social order,” the paper remarked.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, *The Economist* maintained that the self interest of each merchant and trader led to a system of order such as no government could ever conceive or enforce. It was the interference of governments that was anarchy, as was the case in France, where the government had scarcely left any branch of industry free, resulting in poverty, misery, and anarchy. Governments’ proper and only function, the paper argued, was to protect property and person.<sup>39</sup> The passion of regulating everything had become quite a mania. “It is a part of the general want of faith which characterizes the age, and which will acknowledge nothing but what it sees and feels and makes,” it claimed.<sup>40</sup> As Christian Socialist thought made headway in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, *The Economist*’s main objection to the Socialists’ proposed scheme of co-operative associations and educated-class humanitarianism, was simply that they lacked faith in the order and progressive improvement of a competitive society. They were, the paper stated, a class of writers

continually boasting of their spirituality, of their great mental acquisitions, and continually deriding the cold selfishness of merchants, manufacturers, and other patient workers, distinguish themselves by a hard material skepticism, and deny the existence of order unless they can see and feel the regulations for calling it into existence.<sup>41</sup>

“But,” *The Economist* assured its readers, “order prevails; and it is a hard and a vulgar kind of materialism to doubt or deny the existence of order because it has not been prescribed by act of Parliament.”<sup>42</sup> In an 1844 article the paper argued that “the great practical lesson, which society has at present to learn, is that our greatest social inconveniences, though caused by

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<sup>37</sup> “New Means and New Maxims,” *The Economist*, April 22, 1848, p. 451. Also see Scott Gordon, pp. 480-482.

<sup>38</sup> “New Means and New Maxims,” *The Economist*, April 22, 1848, p. 452.

<sup>39</sup> “Reclamation of Waste Lands in Ireland,” *The Economist*, April 3, 1847, pp. 382-383.

<sup>40</sup> “Is Laissez Faire Anarchy?,” *The Economist*, September 1, 1849, pp. 965-966.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid. Also see Scott Gordon, pp. 482-483.

<sup>42</sup> “Is Laissez Faire Anarchy?,” *The Economist*, September 1, 1849, pp. 965-966.

laws, are to be cured only by an utter absence of legislation.”<sup>43</sup> The fundamental basis of *The Economist*’s laissez faire doctrine was faith in natural law, in a natural harmony between individual self-interest and the happiness of the community.<sup>44</sup>

Wilson’s prospectus for *The Economist* lamented the legislation and restrictions which obstructed Britain’s progress. According to Wilson, the public mind was confused and ignorant as no class had been taught the principles of feeding the country, of conducting commerce, or of securing national prosperity.<sup>45</sup> Wilson’s *Economist* was to become a significant force in shaping public opinion over some of the most pressing social issues of its day. The paper overwhelmingly represented and articulated the point of view of the energetic upper echelons of the middle class, gaining a high reputation among them. The middle classes of the late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries were represented as the agents of progress and the bearers of the nascent market economy.<sup>46</sup> *The Economist*, in 1847, felt that the landed interest was still averse to sound economical legislation, “but, they ha[d] succumbed to the organized and intelligent power of the middle classes.”<sup>47</sup> Moreover, the paper argued, “only men in possession of some degree of leisure, or who [could] derive a living from their exertions, [could] attend to politics or the sciences.”<sup>48</sup> The bulk of the public could devote no time to reflect on such subjects, and they naturally and necessarily, in any suffering, eagerly grasped at every prospect of relief. Against their too great eagerness, statesmen firmly adhering to principle were expected to form a barrier. Without that, the paper remarked, it was clear that the empire would “soon be wholly governed by the most ignorant, most clamorous, and most unreflecting.”<sup>49</sup> *The Economist* claimed that a leisure or opulent class was necessary to lead society forward, to point out the dangers in its path and protect its best

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<sup>43</sup> “Colonel Torrens on a Ten-Hours Bill,” *The Economist*, April 20, 1844, p. 716. Also see “Intolerance of Free Traders,” *The Economist*, December 28, 1844, p. 1561-1564.

<sup>44</sup> “New Means and New Maxims,” *The Economist*, April 22, 1848, p. 451.

<sup>45</sup> James Wilson, *Prospectus* [http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=1874022](http://www.economist.com/displaystory.cfm?story_id=1874022).

<sup>46</sup> Polanyi, p. 133.

<sup>47</sup> “Agricultural Politics - Farmers’ Prospects,” *The Economist*, August 7, 1847, pp. 893-894.

<sup>48</sup> “The Wants of Society,” *The Economist*, May 23, 1857, p. 561.

<sup>49</sup> “Faith in Principles,” *The Economist*, January 2, 1847, pp. 3-4.

interests.<sup>50</sup> The development of the economic system, Wilson thought, rested in the hands of the industrious middle classes, and the only hope he saw for the working classes was their ultimate elevation to the middle classes. An increase in the middle classes was to be the result of the union of capital, enterprise, labour, new inventions and more machinery. Wilson did not believe the conditions of workers could be improved by legislative fiat, but rather by an increase in production which would permit a higher standard of living.<sup>51</sup>

While the general ‘truths’ of political economy were well known to educated persons, every now and then, the paper noted, some circumstance occurred which proved that this knowledge had not penetrated deep into the mass of the community.<sup>52</sup> “Comments of the press” and the “sure progress of opinion,” *The Economist* maintained, would assist in educating the masses on the principles of political economy.<sup>53</sup> Undeniably, the press and printed materials had been crucial to the Enlightenment and in forming a print culture. Prominent in the print explosion were newspapers. Read in London’s coffee houses and with nearly every town in England publishing its own, newspapers were public platforms for staging and spreading modern ideas and values. The multitude of newspapers, their cheapness, and the variety of their news articles brought them into universal use.<sup>54</sup> Higher journalism and quality newspapers – the more dignified, intellectual organs of opinion such as *The Economist* – were a characteristic of 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain and it was within them that discussion of economic ideas and theories often took place.<sup>55</sup> According to E. L. Woodward, a contributor to the paper’s *Centenary Volume*, the scope and purpose of *The Economist* illustrated the demand for a practical application of the new type of scientific knowledge.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> “The Wants of Society,” *The Economist*, May 23, 1857, p. 561.

<sup>51</sup> Moncure, pp. 32, 177-178.

<sup>52</sup> “The High Price of Meat Beneficial to the Country,” *The Economist*, July 7, 1860, p. 727.

<sup>53</sup> “Agricultural Agitation,” *The Economist*, October 17, 1846, pp. 1350-1351; “Lord Stanley on Great Towns and Agriculture,” *The Economist*, September 30, 1848, pp. 1102-1103.

<sup>54</sup> See Porter, especially pp. 72-95.

<sup>55</sup> Christopher Kent, “Higher Journalism and the Mid-Victorian Clerisy,” *Victorian Studies* 13 (2) (1969): 181-198.

<sup>56</sup> Chapman, et al, p. 57.

Wilson became a member of the British parliament and *The Economist* became a propaganda organ for the governments in which he served. By the late 1840s he had substantial help with writing and producing the paper as his political responsibilities left him little time to write.<sup>57</sup> The people connected with *The Economist* during this period were leading proponents of political economy in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Thomas Hodgskin and Herbert Spencer were sub-editors until Richard Holt Hutton took over as editor from 1857 to 1861. In 1859 Wilson accepted the Vice-Presidency of the Board of Trade and became a Privy Councillor. Soon after, he was offered the job of Financial Member of the Council of India where he set in motion important financial reforms. During Wilson's 13 years in parliament, all but three of them in office, his status grew steadily. He died in India in 1860 at which time his son-in-law, Walter Bagehot, became editor. From 1861 to his death in 1877, Bagehot broadened the paper and made it a powerful force in the business world.<sup>58</sup>

*The Economist* gained a high reputation and was read in the corridors of power by government leaders, civil servants, and the professional classes. It both reflected and shaped the consciousness of the new capitalist classes in Britain and North America. Its average weekly circulation reached nearly 2,000 in 1843 and settled around 3,500 for the next few years. While this was below the circulation figures of many other newspapers, the size of circulation was not the only gauge of a newspaper's importance. *The Economist* was read by those in the best position to formulate and implement political and economic policies.<sup>59</sup> What gave *The Economist* its primary appeal to men of business was what Bagehot described as Wilson's habit of "always beginning with the facts, always arguing from the facts, and always ending with a result applicable to the facts."<sup>60</sup> Wilson strongly believed that reason had been

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<sup>57</sup> Dudley Edwards, pp. 115, 123.

<sup>58</sup> Dudley Edwards, pp. 199–316 and Scott Gordon, p. 476.

<sup>59</sup> *The Economist*, [http://www.economistgroup.com/what\\_we\\_do/our\\_history.html](http://www.economistgroup.com/what_we_do/our_history.html). Also see Moncure, p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Dudley Edwards, p. 37.



given to man to sit in judgment over the dictates of his feelings.<sup>61</sup> In his time, an ‘economist’ applied to anyone who approached problems by putting every argument to the test of the facts. *The Economist* would go on to campaign for free trade, laissez faire, and individual responsibility through the medium of rational analysis applied to facts.<sup>62</sup>

### ***The Economist’s Writing Style***

*The Economist’s* writing style contributed to its influence and to the framework through which issues were comprehended. The paper claimed its readers wanted to know only the ‘facts’. As it established an orderly, authorless narrative it appeared to be the voice of reason and an objective source, detached from the world. While its text was presented as if it were a transparent window on the world, its news articles were not entirely objective; rather, they were constructed to reflect the paper’s ideology. *The Economist* ensured that the process of constructing articles – the selection, presentation, built-in assumptions, the relative importance given to different factors, and the fact that news itself is a cultural artifact – was masked. While the paper’s sophisticated articles often contained a range of perspectives and discourses, these were arranged in a hierarchy with *The Economist’s* perspective having priority and being the most authoritative. Less-valued voices were associated with particular individuals, or “nominated”, while the most dominant voice, and the one the reader was invited to agree with as the most objective, was not associated with any particular individual, and so was “exnominated.” Exnomination put an emotional distance between the paper and its subject matter as did *The Economist’s* often slightly ironic tone, which made grim reality more palatable, less tragic, and more distant. The paper elevated calculative rationality and ‘hard science’ above emotion, sentiment, soft-mindedness, or any subjective form of

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<sup>61</sup> “The Humanity or Inhumanity of Political Economy,” *The Economist*, December 21, 1844, pp. 1537-1538.

<sup>62</sup> Dudley Edwards, p. xi, 17.

knowledge. Being bold and aggressive on one hand, and measured and rational on the other, *The Economist* appeared to be tough-minded but objective.<sup>63</sup>

*The Economist's* writing style gave tremendous weight to the paper, shoring up respect for its supposed truthfulness and its status. In a scientific, authoritative, and sophisticated method, *The Economist* cut through complexity, producing order, coherence, and unity out of a fragmented, multifaceted social world.<sup>64</sup> Graham Hutton, an editor of the paper, maintained that *The Economist* quickly created for itself a position of peculiar international authority. "It spoke not only for that mentality which in Britain was becoming decisive, but also for an international mentality, a view of the world."<sup>65</sup> *The Economist's* ideological position, its view of the world, was endlessly repeated, promoted, legitimated, and above all, naturalized. Its particular vision of progress prevailed over other possible views and indeed made them difficult to conceive of. What *The Economist* proposed was portrayed as reasonable while those who did not adhere to its views were often ridiculed, depicted as ignorant and unreasonable, and accused of standing in the way of progress.

### **Thesis Outline**

*The Economist* reflected and advanced a particular notion of improvement that was first articulated during the Enlightenment. The rural poor, with their attachment to tradition, pre-capitalist social formations, and independence from the market, were especially a threat to capitalist development. This thesis, therefore, examines *The Economist's* obsession with improvement in the English countryside.

Chapter one sets the stage with an examination of *The Economist's* Enlightenment view of nature and its high modernist ideology. In its support for urbanization, enclosures, deforestation, scientific experiment, and a reformed system of property, the paper advocated

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<sup>63</sup> Hooper, pp. 110, 131-137, 199.

<sup>64</sup> Historian Benedict Anderson commented on the role newspapers played in creating 'imagined communities' by tying together unrelated news articles. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2006 ed. (London: Verso, 1983), pp. 33-35.

<sup>65</sup> Chapman, et al, p. 73.

policies that would clear away long-held traditions and pave the way for a capitalist mode of production. This chapter addresses the increased state action that was needed in the countryside to accomplish these changes and to make the rural population legible.

Chapter two explores *The Economist's* promotion of a capitalist mode of agricultural production. It contends that the system of high agriculture the paper supported was productive only in a liberal economic sense. It exposes *The Economist's* contradictions and argues it was not willing to rely completely on the market to organize production. A capitalist mode of production needed government measures that would drive the rural poor from the land, force them to become wage labourers, and prevent any return to self-provisioning.

Chapter three highlights how the rural poor were to be reformed and integrated in a market economy through the techniques of government. Though *The Economist* argued rational people understood the benefits of wage labour and naturally complied with the discipline of the market, this chapter argues that education, reconstructed homes, and a strict administration of the Poor Law were sites of governmentality that disciplined and shaped the rural poor's interests and ways of thinking and being. This chapter explores how 'good' citizens were constructed.

This thesis concludes that *The Economist* was (and is) one of the most dangerous newspapers in the world, for it obfuscated the process of capitalist development and helped make the inequality and poverty that was an essential component of the emergence of capitalism more acceptable. *The Economist* was influential in creating and disseminating an enduring version of capitalism that has shaped our modern world – a capitalism that appeared to emerge out of an enlightened, progressive, and rational domain. Its articles molded the attitudes and conduct of those who would be responsible for spearheading the far-reaching developments that would transform the English countryside and grow to encompass much of the world.

## CHAPTER ONE - Removing the Barriers to Capitalism

Nature was a key concept of the Enlightenment and its proponents were preoccupied with rethinking man's place in it. Advances in science gave a greater understanding of the natural world and prompted an unprecedented desire and ability to use and control the forces of nature. The biblical mandate to master the earth was rationalized; man's right, his duty even, was to harness and improve nature, producing order, uniformity and profit. These Enlightenment views of nature underpinned the ploughing, planting, mining, draining, and deforestation of Europe, all praised for turning nature's resources into wealth. Throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries new managerial approaches to nature, new instructional literature on agricultural improvement, and farming on sound scientific principles were widely promoted. The idea that Europeans lived outside of nature and dominated and shaped it through their ingenuity became prominent. It was an age when Europe's mastery over nature was being ever more confidently proclaimed.<sup>1</sup>

*The Economist* added its influential voice to this anthem. It espoused an Enlightenment view of nature and articulated a high modernist ideology – a confidence about the development of scientific knowledge, the expansion of production, and increased control over nature to bring about a new rational order.<sup>2</sup> In the name of improvement it championed vast changes in the countryside: a shifting of labour from agriculture to industry, enclosure of common land, deforestation, scientific experiment, and a private property regime that enabled – it insisted – more productive use of the land. The paper argued these transformations came about naturally as society advanced, and were beneficial for the whole country.

This chapter contends these changes did not make any sense, nor did they occur naturally. The state played an essential role in the paper's high modernist vision. One of the most important functions of the modern state was to map the countryside and make the rural

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<sup>1</sup> Porter, pp. 295-319 and David Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1996), p. 19.

<sup>2</sup> Scott, pp. 89-90.

population legible. The collection of agricultural statistics, which *The Economist* was obsessed with for nearly two decades, would allow the state to ‘see’ where barriers to capitalism still remained.

### **European Exceptionalism**

“European exceptionalism” or the “European miracle” was the idea that Europe, because of its internally generated historical superiority, naturally progressed ahead of all other societies and was an example to be extended to the rest of the world. This idea began in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Western Europe, where a belief system was being constructed to give coherence to the new rationality within Europe and colonial expansion outside Europe. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century a number of theories for Europe’s exceptionalism emerged, or became concrete, which justified and assisted vast changes at home and abroad. They included the postulates that Europeans were of superior heredity and rationality, as well as explanations that they progressed because of their superior institution of private property, technological innovations, the rise of European cities, and increased trade.

Another dominant theory was based on geographic and climatic explanations – on the belief that societies could be understood within the context of their natural environments. It was argued that Europeans were more advanced and complex because of their temperate climate and barren soils; a rigorous climate, it was believed, led to an enterprising nature and higher degree of exertion.<sup>3</sup> Other societies were constrained by their tropical or unvarying climates and their fertile, easily-cultivated soils. These environmental factors supposedly accounted for their mental flabbiness, feebleness, laziness and, thus, their lack of progress.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See J. M. Blaut, *The Colonizer’s Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: The Guilford Press, 1993), pp. 10, 18-26, 50-135.

<sup>4</sup> Arnold maintained ideas about European exceptionalism dated back to physician Hippocrates of Kos in the fifth century B.C. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, in a highly influential work, repeated the Hippocratic formula. Likewise, historian H. T. Buckle’s *History of Civilization in England*, published in volumes from 1857-61, expounded on the effects of certain ‘physical laws’ – such as climate and soil – on the development of civilization. Charles Darwin’s evolutionary ideas in his book, *On the Origin of Species*, published in 1859, were also used to support the view that different races represented different stages in the evolutionary process and that different environmental conditions had been a significant factor in this

To this was added the 19<sup>th</sup> century understanding that societies progressed through stages, beginning with hunting and gathering, moving on to agriculture, and ending in a stage of commerce whereby they had successfully mastered nature. It was argued that within the agrarian stage, most of the population was dependent on local lords and restrained by tradition. Europe's good fortune, historian David Landes claimed, lay in its increased freedom from these rigidities. Europe's cities, he maintained, were "gateways to freedom, holes in the tissue of bondage that covered the countryside."<sup>5</sup> Within Europe's cities merchants were able to develop institutions to protect private property and allow the market to operate freely. Overall, proponents of European exceptionalism believed other societies had been moulded by their environments and were still governed by them, while Europe, though less favourably endowed, had by virtue of its industry and urbanization broken free of the shackles of climatic constraint. Europe had learnt, as other societies apparently had not, how to compensate for nature's 'deficiencies', and by mastering nature, had become civilized and prosperous.<sup>6</sup>

*The Economist* gave expression to these widely felt attitudes. Its disdain for the countryside as a backward place, hindering Britain's progress, was couched in environmental determinist terms. *The Economist* claimed it was a general rule that a very fertile soil did not foster an industrious people. The Mexicans, it mentioned as one example, obtained an "easy subsistence by the great productiveness of maize and plantains, [grew] up in idleness, and [were] now and then by a famine scourged off the earth." Likewise, the Irish, procuring for a

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diversification. See Arnold, pp. 9-38, 158-159. Marx also expressed ideas about European exceptionalism. He asserted that tropical regions did not develop toward capitalism because in those regions "nature [was] too prodigal with her gifts . . . . Man's own development [was] not in that case a nature-imposed necessity." *Capital*, Vol. 1, p. 649.

<sup>5</sup> David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1998), pp. 36-37.

<sup>6</sup> Landes, especially pp. 5, 17-18, 29-44 and Arnold, pp. 24-28. Also see Eric Jones, *The European Miracle: Environments, Economics and Geopolitics in the History of Europe and Asia*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), E. A. Wrigley *People, Cities and Wealth: The Transformation of Traditional Society* (Oxford: Basil Blackwood Ltd., 1987), especially pp. 151-152 and Jim Handy, *The Menace of Progress: A History of Colonialism and the Failures of Development*, Ch. 1 and 2 (manuscript in preparation).

long period an easy subsistence by the growth of the potato, failed to acquire habits of industry, and were overtaken by calamity. In like manner, the population of the fertile plains of South America obtained an easy subsistence from the rapid multiplication of vast herds of cattle, and, “delighting in wild freedom . . . acquired only habits of strife and rapine, and [knew] nothing of that steady industry which [won] from Nature all her most useful gifts.” In agriculture, the paper noted, nature spontaneously bestowed very large rewards on comparatively small toil while in manufactures nature’s rewards could not be obtained without great toil. *The Economist* proposed that, as the rule, the British agricultural classes, from having more done for them by nature than the other classes, would be less energetic and less regularly and steadily industrious. “In fact, we find them so, and they are complained of as being behind the rest of the community.” *The Economist* looked for men of energy and action amongst those who had a living to get or a fortune to make, not amongst those who were amply and easily provided for as they would “in the long run, be overshadowed by those who acquire[d] strength from buffeting with Nature or with fortune for greatness.”<sup>7</sup> It argued that merchants, manufacturers, and engineers were the men who made fortunes while those still employed in the cultivation of the soil were “avowedly the most wretched and ignorant portion” of Britain’s population. The paper maintained that if people were to be directed to some particular pursuits with reference to their future improvement, town occupations were much more likely to be profitable than directing additional hands to cultivating the soil.<sup>8</sup>

*The Economist* thus determined that agriculturalists, because they did not force nature to do their bidding, were less fit than industrialists. In turn, nature apparently had its own rewards and punishments: the industrious town-dwellers prospered while the indolent agriculturalists suffered. By establishing that rural Britain was subject to nature to a far

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<sup>7</sup> “A Peculiarity of Agriculturalists,” *The Economist*, September 3, 1853, p. 989; “Agricultural Statistics,” *The Economist*, August 25, 1855, pp. 924-925.

<sup>8</sup> “The Cultivation of Waste and Other Lands. Native Industry,” *The Economist*, December 28, 1844, pp. 1562-1564; “Future Improvement of the People,” *The Economist*, October 5, 1850, pp. 1098-1099.

greater degree than the towns, the paper set out to prove its inferiority and backwardness, and hence, too, the need to bring about its improvement – to separate rural Britain further from nature. This discourse was essential to building support for capitalism for it allowed the paper to imagine itself as helping to elevate people, while actually creating scarcities and poverty by limiting people's access to natural wealth.<sup>9</sup>

According to *The Economist*, the growth of towns in Britain was coincident with the progress and improvement of society. Town-dwellers were “like good soldiers, wrestling against the ills of life – forcing fire and air and water and gravity and electricity to do their bidding – and gaining a great victory over want and poverty and destitution.” They conquered nature, *The Economist* pointed out, and whatever stood in the way of their success had to yield sooner or later. “To complain of defeats resulting from the laws of Nature [was] as idle as to complain of the wind and the rain.”<sup>10</sup> In arguing that town-dwellers had a disposition and capacity for improving their own condition, *The Economist* reiterated the views of Adam Smith. He proposed that profit-seeking was human nature and held that a commercial society gave this natural propensity “to truck, barter and exchange” free rein. Industrialization and urbanization, therefore, he claimed, brought a whole new and superior form of freedom – that of liberty under the law, a true hallmark of civilization. Freed from dependence on a lord or ties to a place, individuals in a commercial society came to enjoy an independence unique to the modern market. Smith maintained that human nature's tendency to seek profit justified an urban commercial society.<sup>11</sup> As a result, not only the environment, but human nature could explain why cities were best.

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<sup>9</sup> Perelman, p. 102.

<sup>10</sup> “Why is There a Deficient Town Population in Ireland?”, *The Economist*, April 18, 1846, pp. 499-501; “Apparent Decline of the Landed Interest,” *The Economist*, July 2, 1853, pp. 728-729.

<sup>11</sup> Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, edited by R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 30, 412. Porter refers to this aspect of Smith's work at some length in pp. 388-392.



*The Economist* endeavoured to show that urbanization not only produced freedom and civilization, but generated vast economic advantages beneficial to all, including the rural classes. It claimed that towns stimulated and assisted agriculture: railroads allowed farmers to send their produce to rich markets and neighbouring towns supplied the means of high cultivation. Where manufacture was energetic and commerce enterprising, the farmer found the greatest profit and the landowner received the highest rent.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, if the manufactures and commerce of a country were in a flourishing condition, *The Economist* argued, the whole labour of the community would flourish with it. Husbandry had followed the commercial progress of the country, though with unequal and lagging steps, and had partaken largely of the benefits derived from extended commerce and important advances in manufacturing.<sup>13</sup>

The paper claimed towns also relieved the agricultural class as a body and land as a property from taxes and 'surplus' population.<sup>14</sup> *The Economist* proposed that every additional person removed from the rural districts, where his labour was not required, to the manufacturing districts, where he could be profitably employed, and where his increased consumption of commodities would contribute to state revenue, benefited the whole country.<sup>15</sup> It was a sign of progress to produce more food by less labour, the paper insisted. Such had been the progress in England where draining, the use of improved machinery, the multiplication of artificial crops, and the system of scientific agriculture had within the last 30 years more than doubled the produce of agricultural labour. The increased quantity of grain grown and the decreased proportion of the people devoted to agricultural pursuits had already "broken down the parochial and patriarchal barriers which made each spot of the land a gaol, though a home, for a particular portion of the community, and the same progress will cause

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<sup>12</sup> "Lord Stanley on Great Towns and Agriculture," *The Economist*, September 30, 1848, pp. 1102-1103.

<sup>13</sup> "The Progress of Agriculture," *The Economist*, October 16, 1858, pp. 1151-1152.

<sup>14</sup> "How Can Land Best Be Relieved?," *The Economist*, February 21, 1846, pp. 230-231.

<sup>15</sup> "Our Statistical Number: The Progress of Population – Agricultural and Manufacturing," *The Economist*, November 11, 1843, p. 189; Letter to the Editor, "Effect of a Repeal of the Corn Laws on the Labourers," *The Economist*, January 24, 1846, p. 105; "How Can Land Best Be Relieved?," *The Economist*, March 7, 1846, p. 296.

them to be entirely removed,” *The Economist* declared.<sup>16</sup> According to the paper, England’s urbanization had been the country’s ‘gateway to freedom’. Not only in England, but everywhere and at all times, *The Economist* claimed, the necessary subsistence of the human race had been obtained by a diminishing quantity of labour on the land as society advanced.<sup>17</sup>

The paper maintained that towns were not only beneficial for everyone, but their growth was due to a law of nature. The congregations of men into masses, professing various arts, working together and helping one another, as only contiguous men could, were “according to the order of nature and essential to the progress of society.”<sup>18</sup> *The Economist* denounced those who advocated returning to the land, whose main principle, it argued, “was opposition to all natural progress.” For the paper, the movement to towns was spontaneous, thus natural. *The Economist* criticized those who had a notion that everything spontaneous was evil and aimed at stifling it. This class was “now mourning over the increase of towns-people, and would drive them back into an agricultural arcadia of their own fancy,” the paper claimed. These “sages” counseled the people amiss and “would divert them from the course of improvement they have entered on to become something like pauper occupants of small allotments of land, or inhabitants of self-sustaining villages.”<sup>19</sup> The only safe way, *The Economist* claimed, to determine if employment and food could be best obtained directly by cultivating the soil or by producing other commodities which could be exchanged with other countries for food, was to leave capital and labour perfectly free to be employed in the manner that private enterprise would find to result in the greatest profit.<sup>20</sup> Besides, it was evident, the paper argued, that no charity would suffice to keep down the deluge of pauperism which was flowing in upon the towns from the country.

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<sup>16</sup> “Scarcity of Labour,” *The Economist*, September 8, 1855, pp. 979-980.

<sup>17</sup> “Conflict of Peasantry and Landlords,” *The Economist*, April 11, 1846, pp. 467-468.

<sup>18</sup> “Why is There a Deficient Town Population in Ireland?,” *The Economist*, April 18, 1846, pp. 499-501.

<sup>19</sup> “Future Improvement of the People,” *The Economist*, October 5, 1850, pp. 1098-1099.

<sup>20</sup> “The Cultivation of Waste and Other Lands. Native Industry,” *The Economist*, December 28, 1844, pp. 1562-1564.

This was a nonsensical argument, for the measures *The Economist* advocated, explored more fully below and in the next chapter, increased pauperism in the countryside and forced rural to urban migration (as similar measures have done since everywhere in the guise of development). For the paper, the increase in pauperism was, therefore, not an indication that agrarian change should be held back, slowed down, or rethought, but rather it reinforced the necessity of going even further and faster in agrarian change to allow industry to soak up these paupers. *The Economist* repeatedly argued the only hope lay in cheap bread, extended commerce, enlarged manufactures, and the increase of a town population. To narrow those means was “to stop up the safety-valve of the machine.”<sup>21</sup> Indeed, “it was folly, not to say injustice, of attempting to encourage agriculture at the expense of the manufacturing and trading community.”<sup>22</sup>

*The Economist* claimed it was through the growth of a town population that “the future progress of comfort, of luxury, of art and science [were] provided for, and those who [were] hurt by the inevitable consequences, should look before them and get out of the way.” It argued landowners and farmers were naturally diminished as society advanced; they were “injured in much the same manner as the Indians [were] injured by the growth of a much more skilful and powerful people than themselves in the territory they exclusively occupied a few centuries ago.”<sup>23</sup> Happily for the farmers and landowners, and for the world, *The Economist* maintained, their arbitrary self-will and political power had been curbed by the silent growth of towns, and because of this growth, England was gaining in freedom and prosperity.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> “Incendiary Fires in the Country,” *The Economist*, January 13, 1844, p. 388, citing a story from the *Liverpool Mercury*; “The Protectionist Clergy,” *The Economist*, June 15, 1850, p. 650.

<sup>22</sup> “The True Source of Agricultural Prosperity,” *The Economist*, April 27, 1844, p. 733, citing a story from the *Free Trade Circular* of the Liverpool Anti-Monopoly Association, No. 4.

<sup>23</sup> “Apparent Decline of the Landed Interest,” *The Economist*, July 2, 1853, pp. 728-729.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

### **‘Collecting wealth into heaps and population into dense masses’**

A phrase in *The Economist* by Mr. William Trotter, a British farmer, perhaps most accurately describes the general tendency of the age, “which [was] that of collecting wealth into heaps, and of population into dense masses.”<sup>25</sup> This was exactly what the paper proposed in its support for urbanization. *The Economist* justified dispossession, depopulation, and a transfer of wealth with the argument that because agriculturalists did not manipulate nature, they were less fit, backward, and lacked the necessary stimulus to work and accumulate wealth; they were thus naturally overtaken by a stronger, more industrious class of town-dwellers. The paper also justified urbanization by claiming it was the result of rational human behaviour, and it promoted further urban growth by arguing that civilization, freedom, and progress required shifting ‘unproductive’ labour from the countryside to the city, from agriculture to industry. *The Economist* claimed urbanization was beneficial for everyone: ‘surplus’ rural labour found employment in manufactures, the countryside was relieved of paupers and taxes, agriculture was improved, and wealth was created in England’s dynamic towns. To intervene in the “natural tendency of increasing wealth and prosperity,” would in fact do more harm than good, *The Economist* maintained.<sup>26</sup>

Yet there was nothing natural or inevitable about the exodus from the countryside. The process of primitive accumulation had been going on for some time; by the 18<sup>th</sup> century much of Britain’s land had been expropriated from the rural poor and was concentrated into fewer and fewer hands. Government measures, such as the enclosure of common land, forced migration to urban areas. Moreover, towns, central to *The Economist*’s theory of economic development, did not develop spontaneously but began as artificial units that were granted specific privileges by the state. Towns were often formed around an industry that was allowed special liberties. As new wealth from colonial conquests and foreign trade provided

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<sup>25</sup> “Good Farming – The Helps and Hindrances,” *The Economist*, May 4, 1861, pp. 484-485.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

capital for investment in manufacturing, capital shifted much of its activity to places such as Leeds, Liverpool, and Manchester, where it could be less encumbered by traditional labour regulations.<sup>27</sup> Towns were also dependent on developments in road and rail transport. The state, therefore, played a significant role in urbanization. It formed the preconditions for a market economy and was an active agent in the economy, encouraging the growth of new industries and providing a protected home market in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Thus the mobility of labour was not due to natural market forces, but involved issues of state power and policy.<sup>28</sup>

State power was also needed to wield military power to secure foreign markets. Britain's traditional system of food production had been weakened by the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and population growth, coupled with the process of primitive accumulation, resulted in the British becoming increasingly dependent on imported grain. That *The Economist* proposed it would be beneficial to remove most of the country's food producers from the land at a time when Britain could no longer feed itself seems an unreasonable proposition. Becoming dependent on other countries for food involved no less than an act of faith and forcing the migration of thousands of small producers did not help agriculture, but furthered the process of primitive accumulation, turning the rural poor into even poorer urban dwellers.

Repeatedly, *The Economist* extolled town life as the source and centre of progress, providing the conditions of a civilized life. It confidently suggested that "modern towns [were] great wonders and great blessings . . . the home of advancing civilization, the abodes

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<sup>27</sup> See Eric B. Ross, *The Malthus Factor: Poverty, Politics and Population in Capitalist Development* (London: Zed Books, 1998), pp. 17-18, Perelman, p. 219 and Polanyi, p. 104.

<sup>28</sup> Martin Daunt, *Progress and Poverty: An Economic and Social History of Britain 1700-1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 502, Patrick O'Brien, "Political preconditions for the Industrial Revolution," in *The Industrial Revolution and British Society*, eds. Patrick O'Brien and Roland Quinault (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 124-155, Asa Briggs, *Victorian Cities* (Middlesex: Penguin Books Ltd., 1963), pp. 13, 88, and T. S. Ashton, *An Economic History of England: The 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1955), pp. 16-17, 94.

of genius, and the centres of all the knowledge, the arts, and the science of our race.”<sup>29</sup>

Likewise, many historians and economists who examined standards of living, as conventionally understood in terms of real wages, also contributed to the belief that the surplus rural population that migrated to cities in Britain during the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries became better off. Because real wages were estimated to be higher in large urban areas, they contended that city dwellers enjoyed an increased standard of living. Some also suggested that the increased consumption of imported goods such as coffee, tea and sugar was an indication of a rising standard of living.<sup>30</sup>

Yet conditions in England’s cities were not so civilized. The people forced to inhabit them dealt with squalid living conditions, poor sanitation, excessive disease, high death rates, and segregation according to income and status.<sup>31</sup> Horrified foreign visitors commented that England’s great towns were places of crime, prostitution, and of “smoke, dirt and bustle” that “deformed the face of nature.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, income was not a reliable indicator of standard of living. According to examinations of nutritional indicators such as the height of recruits into the British Army and Royal Marines and height of English and Irish male convicts transported to Australia, rural dwellers were better nourished than urban dwellers. The average height of both rural and urban workers declined after 1780, but this decline was much more significant among urban dwellers and especially among urban-born Englishmen who were shorter than Irish and Scottish soldiers and Irish convicts.<sup>33</sup> This suggests that food security was

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<sup>29</sup> “Administration of Towns,” *The Economist*, May 13, 1848, pp. 536-537. Also cited in Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2005), p. 132.

<sup>30</sup> See Jane Humphries, “Standard of Living, Quality of Life,” in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. Chris Williams (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 287-298 and Robert Allen, *The British Industrial Revolution in Global Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> See Briggs, p. 147, Hunt, pp. 13-74 and Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1969), p. 162-175. Also see E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution: Europe 1789-1848* (Great Britain: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1962), pp. 248-249 and E. J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital 1848-1875* (Great Britain: Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd., 1975), pp. 245-250.

<sup>32</sup> Perkin, p. 161.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Nicholas and Richard H. Steckel, “Heights and Living Standards of English Workers During the Early Years of Industrialization, 1770-1815,” *The Journal of Economic History* 51 (4) (1993): 937-957 and John Komlos, “The secular trend in the biological standard of living in the United Kingdom, 1730-1860,” *Economic History Review*, 46 (1) (1993): 115-144.

decreasing during the time *The Economist* claimed scientific agriculture had dramatically improved production with less agricultural labour. Furthermore, the increased consumption of stimulants such as sugar and coffee by England's industrial workforce could be seen to be the result of falling prices for these imported goods. It is plausible that this consumption was also associated with the increased unavailability of healthy food such as the dairy products and vegetables produced by small-scale farmers – the result, discussed more fully in the next chapter, of a system of agriculture that dispossessed smallholders.<sup>34</sup>

*The Economist* argued the evils of cities were exaggerated and maintained that “abodes of poverty and vice” formed only a small portion of England's towns. When a Public Health Bill was introduced in 1848, the paper vehemently opposed it, arguing that the consequences of such benevolent law-making were mental and moral stupor. Reacting to the proposal that a board be made responsible for the public welfare, *The Economist* argued that

the mental imbecility which is everywhere produced in the masses by such subversion . . . seem to us far greater evils than the perpetuation of bad smells, and generation of partial diseases, suppose they were the inevitable consequence of non-interference by authorities with the dwellings of the multitude.<sup>35</sup>

The paper wished to avoid what it saw as the over-regulation and centralization of Paris' sanitary reform. If the bill became law it feared the English would “bid adieu to neighbourly peace, enterprise, and individual improvement.” *The Economist* was quite happy to argue for bad sanitation rather than the moral degradation of centralization.<sup>36</sup>

It is in the paper's hostility towards the health bill that its contradictions become clear. While government intervention was needed to establish towns and to force a migration of the rural poor to urban areas, *The Economist*, as a proponent of laissez faire, needed to argue that urbanization was a natural occurrence that benefited everyone, including the rural poor. Yet

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<sup>34</sup> Perelman, p. 297.

<sup>35</sup> “Administration of Towns,” *The Economist*, May 13, 1848, pp. 536-537.

<sup>36</sup> “Administration of Towns,” *The Economist*, May 13, 1848, pp. 536-537; “The Health of Towns Bill,” *The Economist*, May 20, 1848, pp. 564-566; “The Dictatorship of Paris. Centralisation,” *The Economist*, July 15, 1848, pp. 789-790. Also see Hunt, pp. 303-304.

once the rural poor became even poorer urban dwellers, the paper fiercely fought against measures that would improve their condition.

### **Reclaiming the ‘rural and moral wildernesses’**

In its anti-rural rhetoric *The Economist* set up urban areas as places of progress and the countryside as a place in need of improvement. One of the first areas that needed to be improved was any remaining common land. Common or waste land was used by villagers for pasturage or cultivation; they had rights and access to the land without ownership of it. For commoners, access to land and common right were the basis for their livelihood. Improvers, however, deplored the “immoral independence” of commoners, the unimprovability of their pastures, and the constraint on production represented by shared property. The main excuse improvers gave for enclosure of common land into private property was national improvement; the country would benefit from increased agricultural production, they argued.<sup>37</sup> Beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, land was enclosed into private property. From the 17<sup>th</sup> to the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, enclosures were combined with a fierce persecution of vagrancy, seen as necessary to control the poor and by taking away their access to common land, induce them to labour.<sup>38</sup> Between 1750 and 1850, about a quarter of England’s land was transformed from common or waste land into private property.<sup>39</sup> Though by the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century most of England’s common fields had been enclosed through acts of Parliament, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were final surges to enclose.<sup>40</sup>

*The Economist* was committed to 19<sup>th</sup> century campaigns for enclosure. Like the President of the Board of Agriculture, Sir John Sinclair, who put the origins of commons in

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<sup>37</sup> Pre-1750 enclosures typically changed land use from open arable fields into pastures. After 1790, enclosures brought marginal land such as wastes, heaths and moors into cultivation. See J. M. Neeson, *Commoners: common right, enclosure and social change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 5, 7-11, 329, K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the labouring poor: social change and agrarian England, 1660-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), Ch. 4 and Boaz Moselle, “Allotments, enclosure, and proletarianization in early nineteenth-century southern England,” *Economic History Review*, 68 (3) (1995): 494.

<sup>38</sup> Handy, *The Menace of Progress*, Ch. 2 and Polanyi, p. 104.

<sup>39</sup> Ross, p. 14.

<sup>40</sup> Turner, pp. 13, 32, 81.



the dark ages and saw them as an enemy to be beaten, *The Economist* argued one of the first steps in the emergence of a people from a barbarous condition was the severance of each man's portion of land from that of his companions. Without land as an exclusive possession, it claimed, men could not be induced to render it productive.<sup>41</sup> *The Economist* also reiterated the views of John Locke, who in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, stressed that land which was wholly left to nature – that did not have the improvement of cultivation – was 'waste' and had no benefit. Commons, therefore, had no benefit for Locke pointed out how much more productive one acre of "inclosed and cultivated land" was than one acre "of an equal richnesse, lyeing wast in common."<sup>42</sup> Locke's foremost argument for enclosure was the enormous advance in productivity private land enabled. This, he argued, was reason enough for excluding any other rights to land.

*The Economist*, too, argued a significant barrier to adding to the food and employment of England was the large quantity of waste land not in cultivation. Wastes in mass were confined to certain districts, the paper noted, and generally had complex common rights which interfered with individual efforts to reclaim them. Yet it was in reclaiming large commons – heaths or forests – that the advantages of such operations were most striking and attractive. It was particularly disturbed by the "useless, unprofitable waste in the hands of the crown" of the New Forest in Hampshire.<sup>43</sup> There could be no doubt, the paper argued, that by judicious management, the whole 65,992 acres of the New Forest might be let on long leases

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<sup>41</sup> Sir John Sinclair, *Memoirs of Sir John Sinclair*. Cited in Neeson, pp. 30-31. "Enclosure of Waste Lands – Parliamentary Evidence on the Subject," *The Economist*, April 26, 1845, pp. 384-385; "Property in Land – Tenant-Right," *The Economist*, November 27, 1847, p. 1368.

<sup>42</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*. Cited in Wood, pp. 61-62. Also see *Oxford English Dictionary* online, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, [http://dictionary.oed.com.cyber.usask.ca/cgi/entry/50281276?query\\_type=word&queryword=waste&first=1&max\\_to\\_show=10&sort\\_type=alpha&search\\_id=I5Fv-mYUam4-11056&result\\_place=1](http://dictionary.oed.com.cyber.usask.ca/cgi/entry/50281276?query_type=word&queryword=waste&first=1&max_to_show=10&sort_type=alpha&search_id=I5Fv-mYUam4-11056&result_place=1).

<sup>43</sup> "Reclamation of Wastes – The New Forest," *The Economist*, July 10, 1847, pp. 781-782; "Reclamation of Wastes," *The Economist*, October 3, 1863, p. 1100.

to capitalists, who would deforest the land, bring it into cultivation, build farm buildings, and give an ample rental.<sup>44</sup>

At the same time, there were many, perhaps the majority, of the large estates in Britain containing wastes the reclamation of which was also desirable. *The Economist* was disgusted with landowners' little inclination to reclaim the "rural and moral wilderness" their estates represented. That such large portions of soil were out of the reach of improvement was a "national evil."<sup>45</sup> It was a necessity, in their current stage of civilization, the paper argued, that all the land of the nation be available for production; a commercial and industrious nation could no longer permit its soil to remain in a "half wilderness state."<sup>46</sup> It claimed that "the more they did, either in enclosing wastes or in giving a higher cultivation to the soil which was under tillage, the more they benefited the country at large."<sup>47</sup>

*The Economist* continually argued enclosures would increase productivity, which in turn, would benefit all. Scarcity, it maintained, had awakened the community to the necessity of rendering the soil as productive as possible. With a large, growing population to feed and high unemployment, the whole question of wastes was a critical one. Where the people lacked food and employment, and where there was a large amount of unenclosed land, the paper argued it seemed the most obvious thing in the world to do to promote its severance and enclosure, in order to supply more of what was lacking.<sup>48</sup> By crediting enclosures with creating dramatic increases in productivity and meeting the needs of a growing population, the paper made any opposition to them appear foolish.

To this justification of enclosures *The Economist* added social discipline. Like Arthur Young, one of the most active supporters of enclosure in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, who argued that

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<sup>44</sup> "Letter to the Editor," *The Economist*, July 10, 1847, p. 783; "Reclamation of Waste Land – Whichwood Forest," *The Economist*, September 24, 1859, pp. 1067-1068.

<sup>45</sup> "Free Trade in Land," *The Economist*, June 19, 1847, pp. 698-699; "Cultivation – Legal Improvements – Lord Stanley at Liverpool," *The Economist*, September 15, 1855, pp. 1009-1010.

<sup>46</sup> "Free Trade in Land," *The Economist*, June 5, 1847, p. 642.

<sup>47</sup> "Redemption of Waste Land," *The Economist*, October 9, 1858, pp. 1123-1124, quoting Lord Lonsdale.

<sup>48</sup> "Enclosure of Waste Lands – Parliamentary Evidence on the Subject," *The Economist*, April 26, 1845, pp. 384-385.

commoners were unproductive, lazy, and dangerous, the paper believed common land generated unemployment and idleness.<sup>49</sup> *The Economist* claimed that isolated labour was of no benefit to the community – it was far less productive than labour when employed in connection with capital and in combination with other labourers under the superintendence of a capitalist of skill and enterprise.<sup>50</sup> Enclosures would provide permanent employment for ‘masterless men’, placing them under the watchful eye of the landholder.<sup>51</sup>

While *The Economist* maintained that anyone who enclosed land in order to improve it enhanced the wealth of the nation, historian E. P. Thompson argues that agricultural improvement “was impelled less by altruistic desires to banish ugly wastes or – as the tedious phrase goes – to ‘feed a growing population’ than by the desire for fatter rent-rolls and larger profits.”<sup>52</sup> Indeed, enclosures were not so much a means of increasing the productivity of land as part of a redistribution of income and a turnover in landowning away from small farmers to large landowners. Enclosures broke existing leases, allowed rents to be renegotiated, and introduced free competition into the market for leases.<sup>53</sup> Thompson concluded enclosures were “a plain enough case of class robbery.”<sup>54</sup> They dispossessed commoners of rights and access to land and aided the creation of a more hierarchical rural society of large landed estates, tenant farmers, and a mass of landless labourers.<sup>55</sup>

In a more recent assessment of enclosures, Robert Allen argues that large gains in agricultural productivity occurred before the parliamentary enclosures that began in Britain in 1750; this significant increase in production, he maintained, was in fact a function of small farmers. From 1740 to 1800, a period of intensive enclosure, output grew only 10 percent. Allen also claimed it was likely, if land, labour and capital were accounted for, that open

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<sup>49</sup> Neeson, p. 32.

<sup>50</sup> “French Husbandry,” *The Economist*, September 13, 1851, pp. 1012-1013.

<sup>51</sup> Wood, p. 65.

<sup>52</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963), p. 217.

<sup>53</sup> Dauntton, pp. 115-117 and Turner, pp. 82-83.

<sup>54</sup> Thompson, p. 218. Marx argued that acres of common land were “stolen” from the agricultural labourers and given to landlords, p. 889.

<sup>55</sup> Turner, p. 73.

communal fields were more productive than enclosed fields. Open fields were ideally suited to experimentation: furlongs rather than fields were the operating units, so land could be shifted to new or experimental uses in small quantities and new crops or techniques were not integrated broadly until they had proven to be beneficial. Allen's assessment, therefore, calls into question the importance of England's enclosed, large, capitalized estates as a source of agricultural improvement and *The Economist's* argument that land needed to be enclosed into private property in order to increase agricultural productivity.<sup>56</sup> It also disputes the paper's claims, examined more fully in the next two chapters, that non-capitalist farmers were slow to change and lacked a desire to innovate.

Arthur Young, once one of the most influential supporters of enclosure, later recognized how enclosures had made conditions worse for labourers and remarked that he "had rather that all the commons of England were sunk in the sea, than that the poor should in future be treated on enclosing as they have been hitherto."<sup>57</sup> Though Young would come to question his belief in enclosing, *The Economist* was a steadfast advocate for enclosure and, hence, for a policy that increased pauperism and inequality.

For *The Economist*, reclaiming common land and deforesting waste land for cultivation not only led to productivity, but contributed to a sense of order. It pointed out the enormous aggregate of waste land represented by hedgerows, fences, and timber trees and argued that three-fourths to three-fifths of the hedgerows and fences "might be grubbed out advantageously for the country."<sup>58</sup> Near the hedgerows the crop was always less productive and a great loss of time and power were sustained in working the land from the frequent turnings necessary in small fields.<sup>59</sup> Although few people would like to see the country

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<sup>56</sup> Allen, pp. 59, 63-74, 115.

<sup>57</sup> Arthur Young, *Annals of Agriculture and Other Useful Arts*, vol. xxvi. (London: Printed for the editor and sold by H. Goldney, 1785), p. 214. Porter refers to Young on p. 317.

<sup>58</sup> "Impediments to Good Husbandry," *The Economist*, September 10, 1859, pp. 1010-1011; "Reclamation of Wastes," *The Economist*, October 3, 1863, p. 1100.

<sup>59</sup> "Game, Timber, and Hedgerows," *The Economist*, February 19, 1859, pp. 199-200.

denuded of trees, the paper admitted, “it could not be denied that in many parts of the country the timber was in excess, and was highly detrimental to the crops.”<sup>60</sup> It commended the members of a farmer’s club who wished to grow timber on plantations and to keep hedgerows to a minimum. As the members reasoned, there did not have to be any loss of beauty to the landscape by the removal of all the trees from the midst of arable land.<sup>61</sup> Clearing up the borders and corners of their field, keeping their yards and homesteads neat and orderly, and so forth, was not a lost and unproductive expenditure for farmers, the paper argued. Such tidiness was “at once a consequence and a cause of order, and order in a business so multifarious as farming [was] one of the most certain sources of profit.”<sup>62</sup>

*The Economist* claimed the clearing of forests and reclaiming of wastes symbolized the triumph of energy over lethargy. It argued clearing and tilling the land improved it and brought beauty and order to the landscape, as well as economic gain. At the same time, *The Economist* completely ignored Britain’s environmental degradation. Britain’s use of wood for cooking, heating, shipbuilding, and other industries had led to its dramatic deforestation; by the 1600s Britain was far too deforested to meet its own needs.<sup>63</sup> Deforestation had detrimental effects: fuel and timber shortages were a major problem in parts of Britain as forest land gave way to agricultural land. Moreover, as the demand for wool grew, forests were cleared in favour of sheep, resulting in diminished forest cover and land degradation.<sup>64</sup> Due to soil erosion and silt deposits at the mouths of rivers, malaria affected between 47 to 71 per cent of the local population in wetland regions throughout Europe.<sup>65</sup> Some speculate

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<sup>60</sup> “Practical Suggestions. Farm Leases,” *The Economist*, December 15, 1849, pp. 1390-1391.

<sup>61</sup> “Game, Timber, and Hedgerows,” *The Economist*, February 19, 1859, pp. 199-200.

<sup>62</sup> “Careful Cultivation,” *The Economist*, October 27, 1855, pp. 1178-1179.

<sup>63</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), p. 220 and Kenneth Pomeranz and Steven Topik, *The World That Trade Created: Society, Culture, and the World Economy 1400 to the Present*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 2006), p. 247.

<sup>64</sup> Roland Bechmann, *Trees and Man: The Forest in the Middle Ages* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), pp. 136-137 and I. G. Simmons, *An Environmental History of Great Britain: From 10,000 Years Ago to the Present* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2001), pp. 97, 105.

<sup>65</sup> Simmons, p. 116.

deforestation had begun to have deleterious effects on climate. Climatic variability, in turn, led to harvest shortfalls. Along with epidemic diseases, and a rise in fuel and food prices and unemployment rates, the 18<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been a period of falling living standards, hunger, and food riots.<sup>66</sup>

Britain's main quandary was that the production of food, fuel, fiber, and building supplies all competed for increasingly scarce land. Constraints linked to energy, and ultimately to quantities of land, were one of the most important impediments to Britain's further economic growth. In order to relieve the constraint of a finite amount of land, Britain turned to coal for fuel, and to the Americas, which supplied Britain with resources and was the destination for many European migrants. Reliance on the Americas and other colonies freed millions of acres of land in Britain for agriculture. Britain was also able to transfer rural labour into manufacturing, in part, because the exploitation of its colonies made it unnecessary to mobilize the huge numbers of workers that would have been needed to use Britain's own land in much more intensive and ecologically sustainable ways. Instead, it acquired many of the supplies it needed by having others grow them, while putting its own labour into additional soldiers, traders, and producers of manufactured goods.<sup>67</sup>

Environmental historian Richard Grove claimed the casual attitude taken by the British toward their own country's deforestation could be explained by the fact that resource demands had been displaced to its colonies. As a result, there were few incentives to take a long-term view of natural resources and no approach to the problem of resource depletion in Britain until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, even when attitudes in other parts of Europe had already undergone a radical alteration.<sup>68</sup> *The Economist* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, after the British had

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<sup>66</sup> John D. Post, *Food Shortage, Climatic Variability, and Epidemic Disease in Preindustrial Europe: The Mortality Peak in the Early 1740s* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 23, 76-77, 186-192 and Handy, *The Menace of Progress*, Ch. 1. Also see Pomeranz, pp. 207, 220-225 and Simmons, pp. 104, 144-145.

<sup>67</sup> Pomeranz, pp. 19, 23, 264, 286-287 and Pomeranz and Topik, p. 247.

<sup>68</sup> Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, tropical island Edens and the origins of environmentalism, 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 56-64.

belatedly become aware of the consequences of deforestation, argued for a wholesale assault on the British environment.

Though much of Europe had suffered from debilitating scarcities since the 14<sup>th</sup> century and “mortality spikes” in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century famine had disappeared from Western Europe.<sup>69</sup> Famines increased devastatingly, however, throughout the rest of the world, due in part to deforestation for the production of export crops. Deforestation in India, Ireland, and the Caribbean occurred primarily because of British demand for agricultural products – mostly wheat, cotton, indigo and tea in India; wheat, flax, cattle, and wool in Ireland, and sugar in the Caribbean islands. As forests were cut down, erosion and flooding resulted, adding to falling agricultural yields and inducing famine.<sup>70</sup> Marx was one of the first to argue that British industrialization depended on resources from elsewhere and that the “plundering of the Americas, India and Africa” were “chief moments of primitive accumulation.”<sup>71</sup> Britain’s need for imports was combined with an economic policy that included a doctrinaire faith in market rationality, even if people were starving. As its national wealth came to depend more and more on the sale of manufactured goods and the acquisition of raw materials from abroad, the desire to gain access to large markets without paying high tariffs became a key aspect of government policy. British statesmen intended to open up world trade and believed it right to do so by force if necessary.<sup>72</sup>

*The Economist* thus fervently advocated for measures that furthered the process of primitive accumulation. Its support for enclosures and deforestation of waste land revealed that even while it claimed to be a proponent of laissez faire, instead of relying on the market to determine the fate of commoners, it depended on government intervention to restrict commoners’ ability to provide for their own needs and on government policies to secure

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<sup>69</sup> Post, pp. 30-50.

<sup>70</sup> Jack Goody, *The East in the West* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 125.

<sup>71</sup> Marx, pp. 915-926. Also see Polanyi, p. 179.

<sup>72</sup> Mike Davis, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Nino Famines and the Making of the Third World* (London: Verso, 2001), especially pp. 9-11 and Bayly, pp. 28, 136-137, 405.

overseas resources. Though the paper claimed that by these measures productivity would increase and benefit all, its argument was illusory; increased inequality, violent colonial ventures, and induced scarcity were the corollaries of improvement.

**‘Breaking up the hard clods of ignorance, prejudice, sloth and indifference’**

In addition to enclosures and deforestation, *The Economist* believed scientific experiment would improve the countryside by breaking up long-held traditions, by producing uniformity, and increasing profits. Not only farmers, but the whole country, it claimed, would benefit by the changes science brought to agriculture. It threw its support behind the institutions and organizations that experimented with science and its application to agriculture. It gave regular notice of lectures on scientific agriculture and supported the establishment of scientific agricultural colleges.<sup>73</sup> In its Literature section, *The Economist* often referred farmers to scientific improvement books and practical references.<sup>74</sup> It also frequently printed articles from the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*. The *Society*’s goal was to “promote improvement, and to spread throughout the country rural knowledge, which was often local and exclusive.”<sup>75</sup> *The Economist* felt the *Society* produced much benefit to agriculture through its means of communicating to thousands of farmers what had been accomplished or attempted by other farmers, and by instructing farmers on the latest benefits of science. The *Journal* formed a record of the progress of English husbandry, gave purpose and direction to agricultural experiment, and made valuable contributions to rural statistics.<sup>76</sup> It was within the *Journal* and other scientific literature, the paper argued, that one

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<sup>73</sup> “Proposed College of Chemistry,” *The Economist*, August 3, 1844, p. 1061; “Agricultural Education,” *The Economist*, January 15, 1848, p. 64.

<sup>74</sup> “The Rural Cyclopaedia, or a General Dictionary of Agriculture,” *The Economist*, February 20, 1847, p. 209; “The Horticultural and Agricultural Almanac,” *The Economist*, November 20, 1847, p. 1348.

<sup>75</sup> The *Society* was formed in 1838 from a group of landowners and an 1836 select committee of the House of Commons on agricultural distress. “Agricultural Progress,” *The Economist*, July 31, 1858, p. 844-845. Also see Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, 5<sup>th</sup> edition (London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd, 1912 (1936), p. 8. Chapter XVII: High Farming 1837-1874.

<http://www.soilandhealth.org/01aglibrary/010136ernle/010136ch17.htm>.

<sup>76</sup> “Economy of Manures,” *The Economist*, January 16, 1847, p. 64; “The Progress of Husbandry in England,” *The Economist*, July 31, 1847, pp. 865-866; “Scientific Agriculture,” *The Economist*, August 26, 1848, p. 966-968.



could discern how “the active and intelligent landlords, joined with the higher class of occupying farmers” were at work,

breaking up the hard clods of ignorance, prejudice, sloth and indifference, which ha[d] pressed so heavily on all attempts to improve: and in their hands . . . the *art* of husbandry [was] rapidly changing into the *science* of agriculture.<sup>77</sup>

For *The Economist*, science was the engine of improvement. It was through science that knowledge would be increased and nature would be at man’s command. The paper strongly encouraged farmers to keep accurate accounts of their cultivation and all the varying circumstances of soil, season, and so forth, under which their crops had been grown. Experiments in the field and the laboratory needed to go hand in hand, it argued, as the science of agriculture was currently “retarded by the want of more sure means of interrogating Nature in the field as well as in the laboratory.”<sup>78</sup> *The Economist* believed that the ultimate aim of applied science, in its relation to agriculture, would be more fully and speedily attained as it succeeded in converting the practical farmer into “a skilful, reasoning, and cautious experimenter, and every agricultural holding into a progressing and profit-giving experimental farm.”<sup>79</sup>

### **Removing ‘feudal trammels, settlements, and incumbrances’**

*The Economist* also argued a less encumbered system of property in land and an active land market were necessary improvements. The paper fervently campaigned for “free trade in land,” which implied that there should be no obstacles to the fullest and most beneficial possession of land and the enjoyment of its fruits. The object of free trade in land was to bring more of “that inert mass of unimproved land” which still existed in Britain, into the market that it might pass into the hands of persons who had both the capital and energy to improve it and render it useful to society. Free trade in land indicated “the sort of reformation in landowning the welfare of the community require[d]” and, the paper argued, could only be

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<sup>77</sup> “Scientific Agriculture for Farmers,” *The Economist*, September 3, 1843, p. 27.

<sup>78</sup> “Scientific Agriculture,” *The Economist*, August 26, 1848, pp. 966-968.

<sup>79</sup> “Experimental Agriculture,” *The Economist*, November 10, 1849, pp. 1236-1247.

accomplished by unfettering settled property – by disentangling it from the trammels which limited its productive powers.<sup>80</sup>

Currently, *The Economist* noted, the system of property in land was barbarous, out of date, and far too complicated. The ownership of land was so beset with “feudal trammels,” so “hampered by settlements, and often so borne down by incumbrances” that land could not be obtained upon terms which induced men of capital and enterprise to embark in its improvement and cultivation.<sup>81</sup> Indeed, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century about 50 percent of all land in England was covered by family settlements which made it difficult to sell.<sup>82</sup> These hindrances arose, argued *The Economist*, from the old, backward notion that land differed from other sorts of property – that it was more sacred and therefore should be dealt with on different principles. That the most coveted land in England should remain hampered by a system originating in feudalism, was a reproach to national intelligence, the paper declared. The personal feelings of a man who was reluctant to let go of his hold upon any portion of the soil which he had once called his own had to give way to the national necessity. “The community has the right to say to every one,” *The Economist* claimed, “either use your property profitably yourself or let others use it for you.” Science could do nothing to improve the land if it was not free, if it was so “locked up by covenants and complexities and restricted by uses.”<sup>83</sup> Property had to be loosed for the market and made capable of being owned quite independently of any grid of custom or of mutuality.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> “The Game Laws,” *The Economist*, September 28, 1844, pp. 1249-1250; “Free Trade in Land,” *The Economist*, May 29, 1847, pp. 605-606; “Free Trade in Land,” *The Economist*, June 19, 1847, pp. 698-699; “Landowning a Business,” *The Economist*, June 12, 1852, pp. 645-646; “Real Property Law Amendment,” *The Economist*, February 5, 1853, pp. 138-139; “Influence of Land Tenure on Production,” *The Economist*, May 21, 1853, p. 562; Land Agents’ Exchange,” *The Economist*, January 10, 1857, p. 35; “Free Trade in Land,” *The Economist*, February 8, 1862, p. 147.

<sup>81</sup> “Free Trade in Land,” *The Economist*, May 29, 1847, pp. 605-606; “Loans on Land,” *The Economist*, January 8, 1853, pp. 35-37; “The Free Disposal of Land,” *The Economist*, September 15, 1855, pp. 1012-1013; “Emancipation of Land,” *The Economist*, August 30, 1862, p. 961.

<sup>82</sup> Pomeranz, p. 73.

<sup>83</sup> “Cultivation – Legal Improvements – Lord Stanley at Liverpool,” *The Economist*, September 15, 1855, pp. 1009-1010.

<sup>84</sup> Dauntton, p. 103.

In arguing that scientific experiment and a reformed system of property in land were ‘national necessities’, *The Economist* justified policies that furthered primitive accumulation. As the rural poor lacked the capital to buy scientific journals or undertake experiments and relied on family settlements for entitlement to land, scientific experiment and a change in property laws were meant to dispossess them of land. Though the paper argued science and new property laws improved the welfare of the whole community, they, in fact, increased the insecurity and poverty of a large portion of the community.

Overall, *The Economist*’s vision of rural change was evidence of its faith in the domination of nature and the use of scientific knowledge to expand production. The changes in the countryside *The Economist* promoted cleared the land of age-old traditions, removed obstacles to capital, and were part and parcel of a move to a change in the mode of production. In addition to these changes, the paper was obsessed with the collection of agricultural statistics in rural England. Statistics would play a crucial role in removing the barriers to capitalism that still remained and would assist in bringing about a new rational order in the countryside.

### **Statistics: ‘The Science of the State’**

From the middle ages, European states had begun to map out their territories. As the modern state became increasingly concerned with the productivity and well-being of its population, these efforts were accompanied by attempts to enumerate, categorize, and assess its population. Thus much of early modern European statecraft was devoted to rationalizing, simplifying, and standardizing what was a “social hieroglyph” of its subjects’ landholdings and complex tenure arrangements, their wealth, location, and identity. In order to mark out the extent of their resources and to utilize them in a coherent way, states needed the legibility of maps and cadastral surveys. Censuses arranged the population in ways that simplified the

state functions of taxation and conscription. The fear of activism and crime also enhanced the state's desire to count people and resources.<sup>85</sup>

As surveys and censuses became more precise and widespread in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, they acquired an important role in Britain and its growing culture of quantification. The early *Economist* contributed to the preoccupation with statistics and sought to be the leading statistical journal of its day. During his time as editor, Wilson used all the useful figures he could find, determined that his readers should understand that there was probably “no science of greater importance to all other sciences than Statistics. In every way connected with the condition of the people – moral, physical, social or material – this science has proved of the deepest importance.” Wilson argued statistics would do more “to wipe away the cobwebs which narrowed prejudices, unworthy jealousies, unchristian animosities and inflamed passion had contrived” than any other reasoning or argument.<sup>86</sup>

If science was the engine of improvement, facts and numbers were its handmaiden. Statistics were a critical part of rational knowledge, of stating and arranging ‘facts’. They were seemingly innocent and implied to be impartial or value-free because they appeared to erase interest and politics.<sup>87</sup> However, statistics were practical tools for the modern state – they were a guide to policy and legislation. Indeed, statistics were “the science of the state.”<sup>88</sup> At the root of the idea of statistics lay the notion that one could improve or control a population by enumeration and classification. Through statistics the idea of a norm became codified; statistics discerned order and regularities, or irregularities, in nature as well as in

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<sup>85</sup> Foucault, “Governmentality,” in *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 97-104. Also see Scott, pp. 2-3 and Bayly, pp. 247-248.

<sup>86</sup> “Introductory Remarks, Explanatory of the Following Tables,” *The Economist*, Supplement November 4, 1843, p. 169. Also see Dudley Edwards, pp. 273-284 for a discussion of how the early *Economist* became a pioneer in quantitative reasoning.

<sup>87</sup> Mary Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact: Problems of Knowledge in the Sciences of Wealth and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. xviii-xxv.

<sup>88</sup> Foucault, “Governmentality,” and Pasquale Pasquino, “Theatrum politicum: the genealogy of capital,” in *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 96, 114-115.

people's habits.<sup>89</sup> They made nature and its resources calculable and society more legible, and hence manipulable. The state's knowledge of itself gave it strength and the legibility and visibility produced out of this knowledge provided the capacity for large-scale improvements.<sup>90</sup>

*The Economist* argued statistical detail of the cultivation of England would do much to aid the desire for improvement and be of great national utility.<sup>91</sup> After several successful experiments in collecting statistics in Ireland and Scotland, Poor Law inspectors were instructed to collect voluntary reports from their respective districts in England. The paper frequently commented on this largely failed endeavour from the late 1840s until the early 1860s. It complained about farmers' reluctance and apprehension over the collection of agricultural statistics, noting that agriculturalists believed the scheme was inquisitorial. They saw it as too close a scrutiny into their affairs, as something by which they could be more heavily taxed or see their rents increase.<sup>92</sup> Some made it appear as if the livestock and land they cultivated were much less than they really were, others refused to complete the statistical returns and many, even "gentlemen of station and influence," were hostile to the whole scheme.<sup>93</sup>

On the other end, the Poor Law inspectors were unhappy with the ill-feeling that was directed towards them because of their new role as enumerators. They did not recommend any extension or repetition of the experiment due to the difficulty they had in obtaining the returns and added that if statistical information was to be collected, there needed to be an enactment rendering the returns compulsory by an act of Parliament. *The Economist* agreed that returns should be made compulsory, that the community be taxed to pay for collecting

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<sup>89</sup> Porter, p. 207, Ian Hacking, *The Taming of Chance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 2-5, 81 and Gyan Prakash, "Body Politic in Colonial India," in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 198-199.

<sup>90</sup> Scott, pp. 2-3.

<sup>91</sup> "Statistics of Agriculture," *The Economist*, September 2, 1848, pp. 995-996.

<sup>92</sup> "Agricultural Statistics – Sources of English Farmers' Objections," *The Economist*, August 4, 1855, p. 846;

"Agricultural Statistics – Scotch and English Views," *The Economist*, December 29, 1855, p. 1431.

<sup>93</sup> "Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, July 14, 1855, pp. 759-760.

them, and that the Poor Law inspectors be left to their proper duties. The paper believed the Board of Trade would be much more likely to secure success, and as there was to be a police in every county, it was not improbable that, as in Ireland, it might be found to be the best machinery to collect agricultural statistics.<sup>94</sup> Thus *The Economist* went from saying that statistics were important, even necessary, to proposing that in the face of opposition to their collection, the oppressive and surveillance powers of the state be heightened and non-submission be made a crime.

As to the resistance of agriculturalists, *The Economist* pointed to the history of the agricultural statistics question in England. Agricultural statistics were started, or at least chiefly advocated, during the anti-Corn Law agitation by some of the most earnest supporters of free trade. The free traders alleged that the statistics of agriculture properly collected and recorded, apart from their scientific value and general usefulness, would greatly elucidate matters of fact in relation to English agriculture. Of course, *The Economist* complained, all the weight of the landed interest was thrown into the scale against agricultural statistics. All sorts of suspicions were intimated as to the uses to which such information might be turned. Opposition to the collection of agricultural statistics succeeded, but after the Corn Laws were repealed, the landlords no longer expressed any vehement objections to their collection; the opposition now came from farmers. The paper also acknowledged that the numbering of people was always evaded as much as possible because it was suspected to be the forerunner of new taxes. As a result, the farmer now associated every attempt to obtain information with an increase of his rent. However, this fear, *The Economist* believed, was the result of the ill-defined relationship between farmers and landlords. It was not the Board of Trade, or the Poor Law Board, or any “twaddle” about centralization the farmers were afraid of, but simply a fear of raised rents. The apprehensions farmers had about their landlords ought to lead them

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<sup>94</sup> “Agricultural Statistics,” *The Economist*, March 22, 1856, pp. 305-306.

to adopt other measures of precaution, not to impede the collection of agricultural statistics, the paper argued. In future collections *The Economist* felt regard should be given to the prejudices of the farmers by making the inquiries as little offensive as possible.<sup>95</sup>

While *The Economist* noted that farmers feared increased taxation, in all it believed their fear was unfounded and mostly ignorant. It argued the real reason many farmers in England did not wish to disclose such statistics was because of the consciousness that their capitals were not sufficient for the proper management of their farms. The paper maintained the capital employed in cultivation of the land was underrated, and socially and politically the farming classes lost much of their influence from their true wealth being unknown. The truth was, it claimed, the farming classes had not yet recognized the plain fact that agriculture was as much a trade as any branch of manufacture, and that whatever threw light upon the relation of supply and demand, or gave them early and general information respecting their concerns, was of great value. Instead, farmers adhered to old traditional instincts and suspicions that induced them to “go on groping in the dark rather than to possess knowledge.” Farmers, in ignorance of facts, could not act with safety, *The Economist* claimed. Their transactions assumed the character of gambling on chances rather than the well-considered speculations or certainty statistics would allow. None of the various adventures and speculations in which enterprising British traders and capitalists engaged was undertaken without accurate information, the paper noted.<sup>96</sup>

While no greater advantage could be afforded to the agricultural classes than a system which would enable them to regulate the value of their crops from year to year, *The*

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<sup>95</sup> “Agricultural Statistics – Scotch and English Views,” *The Economist*, December 29, 1855, p. 1431; “Agricultural Statistics,” *The Economist*, March 15, 1856, p. 282; “Agricultural Statistics,” *The Economist*, March 22, 1856, pp. 305-306; “Agricultural Statistics – Why English Farmers Hang Back,” *The Economist*, April 26, 1856, p. 451; “The Fear of Knowing Too Much,” *The Economist*, November 7, 1857, p. 1235; “Agricultural Statistics,” *The Economist*, July 19, 1862, pp. 791-792; “Agricultural Meetings – Late Rural Discoveries,” *The Economist*, September 26, 1863, pp. 1071-1072.

<sup>96</sup> “Agricultural Statistics,” *The Economist*, November 5, 1853, pp. 1239-1240; “Agricultural Statistics – Sources of English Farmers’ Objections,” *The Economist*, August 4, 1855, p. 846; “Rural Notes,” *The Economist*, February 16, 1856, p. 172; “Agricultural Statistics,” *The Economist*, May 1, 1858, pp. 474-476.

*Economist* felt statistics were also a matter of public importance.<sup>97</sup> It claimed they were necessary for securing a production more exactly adapted to the public's wants and to obtaining a more perfect equilibrium of supply and demand and greater equalities of price. Like 19<sup>th</sup> century high modernists who claimed the scientific domination of nature was emancipatory, providing freedom from scarcity and liberation from the irrationalities of superstition, *The Economist*, ironically, given the demands for their collection to be compulsory, also framed its justification for the collection of agricultural statistics in terms of freedom.<sup>98</sup> With accurate statistics agriculturalists could escape from ignorance into information. Statistics were essential for feeding the country, ensuring against scarcity and, in fact, necessary for a proper functioning of the market, it maintained.<sup>99</sup>

*The Economist* praised the collection of statistics in Ireland for reducing the uncertainty of its food supply:

At this moment the greatest uncertainty exists as to the amount of food which the present crops of Great Britain will afford. . . . In Ireland there is far less doubt; for Lord Clarendon, availing himself of the well-organized constabulary force in that kingdom, has obtained returns of agricultural produce, which give a tolerably accurate notion of the amount of food grown in Ireland.<sup>100</sup>

The paper's praise for the collection of statistics in Ireland was rather ironic. Statistics were better kept primarily because it was a colony, subject to the heavy-handed police controls inherent in the colonial situation. *The Economist*, also ironically, commended Ireland's statistics because they revealed the collapse of the Irish small-scale farmer, which had been a consequence of the potato famine and the intended result of the nature of British government relief provided for the famine.<sup>101</sup> As the paper pointed out, Ireland's statistical report of 1847 revealed that a very important change had been effected in that country since the census of

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<sup>97</sup> "The Wheat Crop of 1849 – Consumption – Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, March 16, 1850, p. 262; "Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, May 1, 1858, pp. 474-476.

<sup>98</sup> Scott, pp. 93, 98.

<sup>99</sup> "Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, November 5, 1853, pp. 1239-1240; "Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, November 19, 1853, p. 1299; "Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, May 20, 1854, pp. 532-533; "Agricultural Statistics – Sources of English Farmers' Objections," *The Economist*, August 4, 1855, p. 846.

<sup>100</sup> "Statistics of Agriculture," *The Economist*, September 2, 1848, pp. 995-996.

<sup>101</sup> Handy, *The Menace of Progress*, Ch. 2.



1841. The report showed the pleasing fact that small farms had diminished in number while large farms had increased by a greater ratio, leading to the general conclusion that a very large increase in the entire quantity of cultivated land had taken place. *The Economist* was impressed with the great clearness and precision with which the statistical returns were prepared and expressed hope that so useful an example as had been set by the Irish government would soon be followed in England.<sup>102</sup>

Statistics had a long history in Ireland. *The Economist* used them extensively to justify non-intervention, starvation, and emigration during the Irish famine and its aftermath. Statistics provided “proof of the correctness of our views” on Ireland, the paper remarked.<sup>103</sup> Earlier, Oliver Cromwell’s massive exercise in colonization, designed to transform the whole of Irish society, required statistics. William Petty, the physician-general of Cromwell’s army, became Cromwell’s ‘Surveyor General’ and gave Ireland “the doubtful distinction of being the most accurately surveyed and mapped country in Europe.”<sup>104</sup> Petty set out in 1679 to map not only the land, but to value it for the purpose of distributing it to Cromwell’s soldiers. He also profited from his role as surveyor, picking up 13,000 pounds sterling and 18,000 acres of land for himself. Petty did not stop at measuring the value of the land, however. His survey gave him the opportunity to examine the social and economic conditions of an entire people. With this information he calculated the comparative value of human beings in ‘improved’ and ‘unimproved’ societies. He computed the economic benefit the crown received from Ireland’s citizens and suggested that the loss of an Irish life cost the crown less than that of an English life. Petty estimated that the improvement of Ireland, under an imperial power whose

<sup>102</sup> “Important Agricultural Statistics – Ireland,” *The Economist*, September 9, 1848, pp. 1018-1019.

<sup>103</sup> For examples of how *The Economist* used statistics in Ireland see “A Possible Cure for Ireland,” *The Economist*, May 9, 1846, pp. 594-596, “Ireland – Its Permanent Evils and Their Remedy – No. I,” *The Economist*, September 19, 1846, pp. 1217-1220, “The Puzzle of Ireland,” *The Economist*, October 10, 1846, pp. 1315-1317, “Agriculture in Ireland – Crops in 1848,” *The Economist*, August 25, 1849, pp. 933-935, “Ireland – Census, Cultivation, Etc.,” *The Economist*, September 13, 1856, pp. 1006-1007, “The History of Famines in Ireland,” *The Economist*, September 20, 1856, pp. 1035-1036, “State of Ireland,” *The Economist*, May 23, 1863, pp. 561-563.

<sup>104</sup> R. F. Foster, ed., *The Oxford History of Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 122-123. Also see Ellen Meiskins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London: Verso, 2003), p. 83.

objective was to transform the Irish, could raise the value of an Irishman to that of an Englishman. With Petty's theory of value came the new 'science' of political economy, and for the English, a demonstration of the 'usefulness' statistics could have.<sup>105</sup> If, in the eyes of *The Economist*, agricultural statistics were to transform English agriculture to more closely approximate Ireland's situation, it was no wonder many people in the English countryside opposed their collection.

*The Economist* argued agricultural statistics would be valuable for showing the improvements which had increased the productiveness of England's agriculture. Even more importantly, the paper felt statistics would be most valuable for revealing which farms needed improvement – which farms were deficient of capital and which soils or crops could be improved.<sup>106</sup> Agricultural statistics of the character of the soil of each piece of land, its state of culture, and whether it was improving or stationary, in juxtaposition with the actual amount of the growing crops, would show many of the causes of abundance or deficiency in each district.<sup>107</sup> As the paper explained:

The collection and publication of all these statistical facts would have an immediate effect on the improvement of land in general. It would be seen that in one district, or in one parish, or on one farm, that the proportion of green crops to grain crops is much greater than in another district . . . that the quantities of stock kept on a given area vary not with the quality of land, but with the system of culture. . . . So we should find that all these differences may be traced to some circumstances which are quite within the control of the persons interested in the land either as owners or occupiers . . .<sup>108</sup>

In other words, accurate statistics would make plain some of the obstacles to improvement.<sup>109</sup>

The fear English farmers felt was common; people were wary of statistics. As the state became more intrusive through the rise of government officials and police to act as agents of surveillance, its need to govern through legibility and visibility came into conflict

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<sup>105</sup> Hacking, p. 17, Meiskins Wood, *Empire of Capital*, pp. 83-85, Pasquino, pp. 115-116 and Perelman, p. 126.

<sup>106</sup> "Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, July 15, 1854, p. 758; "Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, August 25, 1855, pp. 924-925.

<sup>107</sup> "Farming in Norfolk," *The Economist*, July 1, 1848, pp. 736-737.

<sup>108</sup> "Statistics of Agriculture," *The Economist*, September 2, 1848, pp. 995-996.

<sup>109</sup> "Price at Which Wheat Can be Grown," *The Economist*, March 16, 1850, pp. 288-289.

with individuals' need for freedom and autonomy. *The Economist* was advocating for more government intrusion and surveillance in a manner that was opposed by most of the people it would affect. This was clearly not the beneficial workings of the market but rather the heavy hand of the state being used to foster conditions for investment and capital against the wishes of the majority of the rural population.

A bill was introduced that proposed making agricultural statistics compulsory, but it was rejected in the House of Commons in 1858. *The Economist* ridiculed those who rejected the bill, while it was hopeful that as agriculturalists became more self-reliant and enterprising the difficulties in collecting statistics would gradually vanish. It argued that in the present, trust should be given to private enterprise for statistical information about agriculture. But, by 1862 the paper was discouraged and felt any scheme for collecting statistics in rural England was nearly impossible. The government was unwilling to embark on a large expenditure for the purpose, the agricultural population was still apprehensive about the collection of statistical facts, and any attempts to collect them through the police or the Poor Law officers were generally deemed by local authorities to be inexpedient.<sup>110</sup> It was not until 1866 that the *Agricultural Returns of Great Britain* for the first time supplied an accurate account of the acreage, cropping, and livestock of the country.<sup>111</sup>

The capacity of rural society to subvert and thwart the collection of statistics for some time was clearly revealed in *The Economist's* articles. State action was met with a resistant rural society in England that could make its influence felt. Because a key element for the success of high modernist schemes was a weakened or collapsed civil society that lacked the capacity to resist these plans, agricultural statistics were gathered first and most effectively in colonial regimes. Colonies were often 'laboratories of improvement' – places of extensive experiment in social restructuring and testing grounds for the effects of transforming property

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<sup>110</sup> "Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, July 15, 1854, p. 758; "Agricultural Statistics," *The Economist*, July 19, 1862, pp. 791-792.

<sup>111</sup> Lord Ernle, p. 9.

relations. Censuses and surveys were gathered first in colonial regimes partly because colonial governments could not understand these societies and sought to make them legible, in part because colonial governments believed that they needed to tamper with tradition more fully in these societies, and partly because colonial societies were less able to oppose such schemes under the full force of a colonial power.<sup>112</sup>

In all, statistical enumeration attempted to connect the state and the population, to make the countryside and its inhabitants visible, legible, and available to economic calculation. Statistics were especially useful to the state in determining where barriers to capitalism still existed. Statistical information contributed to the making of a national economy and played a central role in the politics based upon a knowledge of population and territory that Foucault characterized as governmentality – the characteristic power of the modern state in which government acted on the conduct of a population so as to shape, guide, and correct their actions. As productivity and wealth creation became increased concerns of the state, it would seek to construct citizens that reflected these concerns.<sup>113</sup>

*The Economist's* desire to bring agriculture under the statistical gaze represented an effort to demonstrate which farms were not yet productive or 'progressive and profit-giving'. This knowledge would justify the dispossession of small-scale farmers who lacked capital. Indeed, in its drive to collect agricultural statistics, *The Economist* was concerned with furthering primitive accumulation, even though the logic of primitive accumulation was in direct conflict with its purported adherence to the values of laissez faire. Statistics required police methods and were intended to dispossess and dislocate the rural poor. Yet the paper claimed the whole country would benefit from the freedom from scarcity and want statistics

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<sup>112</sup> See Scott, pp. 49, 89, 97, 102 and Bernard S. Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among the Historians and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 230-250 for a discussion on the census in India.

<sup>113</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Rule of Experts: Egypt, Techno-Politics, Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), p. 9. Also see Prakash, "Body Politic in Colonial India," pp. 189-222.

would provide. In fact, it argued, statistical information would allow for a proper functioning of the market and farmers themselves could not be safe without them.

In this regard, *The Economist's* arguments were most contradictory. Indeed, its whole ethic of improvement was an ethic of exploitation, dependent on land dispossession and environmental destruction, both in Britain and abroad. While the 19<sup>th</sup> century is commonly thought of as the age of laissez faire, when the state only intermittently and reluctantly intervened in the economy, this chapter demonstrates that governments acted to promote industrial growth and to clear away barriers to capitalism. As it was the rural poor that especially had to be subjugated to the needs of capitalism, *The Economist* advocated a new mode of agricultural production and a wholesale transformation of agrarian relations that would further the process of primitive accumulation. It is to the paper's vision of a capitalist mode of agricultural production that this thesis now turns.

## CHAPTER TWO - Developing a Capitalist Mode of Agricultural Production

Agricultural production was a core area in which changes were needed in order to cement capitalist relations of production. The main reason given by improvers and political economists for a change in production was that Britain's progress required it; the whole country would benefit by it, they claimed. To improve agriculture was to turn it into a commodity-producing enterprise directed toward the creation of surpluses and profits. This capitalist mode of agriculture measured the value of land only in terms of its productivity and profit; any other use it might have was deemed sentimental, antiquated, unproductive, and an obstacle to national improvement.<sup>1</sup>

*The Economist* was concerned with improving and increasing agricultural production, but only in certain ways. It fervently campaigned for free trade in agriculture and then championed the development of 'high farming' – a modern production and profit-driven system of agriculture. High farming, to the paper, required large applications of fertilizer, mechanization, substantial labour and capital investment, free trade, and enlarged landholdings. Central to this vision of agricultural change was the dispossession of the rural poor – the smallholders who lacked the means to farm 'highly'. Indeed, the high agriculture the paper promoted was intended to limit access to land, reserving it for modern, profit-maximizing farmers.

*The Economist* claimed high agriculture was brought about by the organizing miracles of the market and benefited the whole country by dramatically increasing production. This chapter disputes those claims, arguing that a capitalist mode of production was productive only in a liberal economic sense and required government interventions to develop and sustain it. *The Economist's* contradictions were illuminated most clearly, this chapter

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<sup>1</sup> Scott, p. 47.

contends, in its hostility toward any measure that would alleviate rural poverty, even while it claimed that its vision of agricultural change would benefit all.

### **The Move to a Free Trade in Agriculture**

In order to attract capital, energy, and intellectual power to the soil, the paper argued agriculture needed to be freed from anything that stood in the way of capital being fully and securely employed.<sup>2</sup> This included the principle of protectionism. The early *Economist* was intent on seeing the Corn Laws repealed so a free trade in agriculture could be put in place. Established in 1815, the Corn Laws were parliamentary measures that aided British landowners who produced grain by taxing foreign grain imports. The legislation derived from the days of the Napoleonic wars when Britain feared being unable to feed its own population and wished to boost local production. To the free-traders the laws seemed an anachronism.<sup>3</sup>

The Corn Laws, however, had contributed to the process of primitive accumulation. The laws encouraged large-scale grain production and reduced the viability of small-scale farming as the tariff on grain shifted production toward grain and away from the dairy products, vegetables, and other crops small-scale producers grew. Price supports helped larger farmers who marketed the majority of their grain, and only farmers with large amounts of capital could undertake the capital-intensive project of draining wetlands. Moreover, large grain farms required less labour than small-scale farming; grain farming required only seasonal labour, while smallholders usually adopted a system that included several different crops in order to spread labour over a longer period of time. The Corn Laws, therefore, contributed to the amount of labour working for wages.

It was only after the laws had served their purpose in manipulating the domestic labour market and in furthering primitive accumulation that the free-traders abandoned them in the name of freedom of the market. Yet most of the political economists, and *The*

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<sup>2</sup> “Agricultural Meetings – Go on, or Come on?”, *The Economist*, October 17, 1863, pp. 1154-1155.

<sup>3</sup> Bayly, p. 136.

*Economist*, presented themselves as firm opponents of the Corn Laws. Accordingly, they would seem to be blameless for the hardships created by these laws. The paper's silence on the differential impact of the Corn Laws may be seen as the start of its opposition to the small-scale producer and to a practice of obscuring the nature of its mission.<sup>4</sup>

*The Economist* argued against the Corn Laws, and any agricultural protection, by claiming free trade would benefit everyone. Protection added nothing to the national wealth and, in fact, it claimed, any attempt to promote special interests injured the whole community. It was "short-sighted" and "absolutely criminal" with an "excess" rural population, to maintain a system of laws that prevented men from "providing themselves with food through the instrumentality of the best and only resources which England had left" – employment in manufactures. In fact, it argued, to maintain England's protectionist laws would be "as wise and as just if another Ireland were to spring up by our side, and we were to prohibit its cultivation."<sup>5</sup> But by extending England's manufactures and increasing manufacturers' profits, by opening to them unrestricted exchanges with all the world, a far larger, better, more permanent, and more profitable home market would be secured to farmers, the paper maintained. Labour, unrestricted by legislation, would also find its way into the most natural channels and the aggregate wealth of the whole nation would advance.<sup>6</sup>

England found that once manufacturing had taken hold, cheap food was needed for its industrial classes. After the Corn Laws were repealed in 1846, a free trade in agriculture allowed England to service its growing and rapidly industrializing population with foodstuffs from around the world and allowed *The Economist* to advocate for a high farming dependent on free trade.

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<sup>4</sup> Perelman, pp. 294-303.

<sup>5</sup> "The Cultivation of Waste and Other Lands. Native Industry," *The Economist*, December 28, 1844, pp. 1562-1564.

<sup>6</sup> "The Opening of the Session – Lord John Russell and Free Trade," *The Economist*, February 8, 1845, pp. 117-118; "Inefficiency and Evils of the Protective Policy. Lord John Russell's Resolutions," *The Economist*, May 24, 1845, pp. 477-478; "The Corn Crisis – Protection a Delusion," *The Economist*, November 8, 1845, p. 1094; "The President's Message – The Secretary of the Treasury's Report," *The Economist*, January 2, 1847, pp. 1-3.



### ***The Economist's High Agriculture***

Colin Duncan in *The Centrality of Agriculture*, argued that high farming, as it was commonly known in the Victorian era, centered on a four-course crop rotation that used sheep, in effect, as mobile fertilizer factories. He claimed this closed system was more productive, ecologically benign, and labour intensive than other systems.<sup>7</sup> Others claimed, too, that the age of high farming was a golden age in the history of Britain. There was an unquestioning spirit of confidence in the ethos, methods and products of high farming, argued historian Trevor Wild. Landowners and farmers maintained a complete faith in mixed farming, the profitability of which seemed to be eternal.<sup>8</sup> Lord Ernle, in 1912, reasoned high farming advanced because the old system had failed. Open-field farmers and commoners, he argued, could never have fed a manufacturing population or adopted agricultural improvements which required significant expenditures. For Lord Ernle, the most conspicuous difference between the earlier type of agriculturalist and the modern type of farmer was the latter's readiness to invest capital in the land. He admitted the disappearance of small-scale farmers and commoners was a social loss, but it was requisite that farming should be transformed from a self-sufficing domestic industry into a profit-earning manufactory. The 1850s and 60s, he claimed, were a period marked by advancing prosperity, rising rents and profits, a rapid multiplication of fertilizing agencies, an expanding area of grain cultivation, more livestock, and improvements in machinery.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, *The Economist* was convinced that it was by "high cultivation only that the English farmer [could] succeed." It claimed that through high farming, England would see a prodigious increase in the produce of the soil.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Colin Duncan, *The Centrality of Agriculture: Between Humankind and the Rest of Nature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1996), pp. 54-55, 64-68.

<sup>8</sup> Trevor Wild, *Village England: A Social History of the Countryside* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd., 2004), p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Lord Ernle, pp. 1-15.

<sup>10</sup> "Scientific Agriculture for Farmers," *The Economist*, September 3, 1843, p. 27; "Agricultural Self-Reliance," *The Economist*, March 20, 1847, pp. 328-329.

Evidently there was much faith in a system of high farming. Agricultural policy around the world has for centuries called on a scientific or high farming approach to solving the world's food problems, based on the belief that this system created dramatic increases in production.<sup>11</sup> While there could be substantial benefits from the closed system of high farming Duncan described, other accounts like Lord Ernle's call into question the claim that high farming was closed, labour intensive, or that it was sustainable and more productive in the sense Duncan maintained it was. Historian F. M. L. Thompson argued the push to increase yields led to the addition of external inputs. English food production became increasingly dependent on the mining of soils elsewhere and liberal economic ideology held that capital seeking profit should be allowed to pursue its immediate best interests without hindrance.<sup>12</sup> *The Economist* also revealed that it was not content with a closed system of high farming.

For *The Economist*, the foundation of high agriculture was livestock farming.<sup>13</sup> It continuously encouraged increased meat production and consumption within Britain as it felt the great mass of people still did not eat enough meat "to the extent that would be desirable for health and comfort." It claimed that as people became more prosperous through the opening up of commercial and manufacturing outlets they would become greater consumers and consume better kinds of food. High farming would allow people to eat well, but it also meant feeding animals well and "making the land to suit the beasts, rather than starving the beasts to suit the land."<sup>14</sup> *The Economist*, therefore, advocated breaking up second-rate pastures to convert inferior grazing farms to ones of mixed husbandry and urged for improved

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<sup>11</sup> Jim Handy, "'Almost Idiotic Wretchedness': A Long History of Blaming Peasants," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 36 (2) (April 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Duncan, pp. 95-97.

<sup>13</sup> "The Cost of Feeding Stock," *The Economist*, July 15, 1848, pp. 790-791; "High Farming Profitable," *The Economist*, November 11, 1848, p. 1278; "Farming Profit and Statistics," *The Economist*, April 13, 1850, p. 398; "Supplies and Prices of Stock," *The Economist*, May 18, 1850, pp. 539-540; "High Farming by Means of Stock," *The Economist*, August 16, 1851, p. 899; "The State and Prospects of English Agriculture," *The Economist*, January 3, 1852, pp. 8-9; "Rents and Prices," *The Economist*, November 27, 1852, p. 1317; "The Improvements in Agriculture and Future Prospects," *The Economist*, January 29, 1859, pp. 114-115.

<sup>14</sup> "The Supply of Meat, Present and Prospective," *The Economist*, December 2, 1848, pp. 1358-1359.

Irish husbandry in order to satisfy Britain's great want for more meat.<sup>15</sup> It recommended farmers should do all they could to increase their production of both grain and cattle.<sup>16</sup>

*The Economist's* articles testified to a shift from grain production to more meat production – a common feature of an agriculture attuned to the better off consumer who could afford to increase the meat in their diet. In most instances, this shift had a detrimental impact on the land and its ability to produce enough food, and on the diet of the poor. To alleviate the constraints of environmental degradation and limited amounts of land, *The Economist* promoted foreign imports of grain. It was encouraged that farmers were “wisely availing themselves of cheap foreign grain for feeding,” and in a quote from the *Mark Lane Express* noted that many beasts were fattening and

luxuriating in rich mixtures of turnips, hay, and corn brought from various parts of the globe. It is no unusual thing now to see an ox chewing his cud over a meal of maize from America, beans from Russia, linseed from the plains of Germany, and lentils from the banks of the fertile rivers of Egypt. To such a pitch has agricultural commerce come.<sup>17</sup>

But not only were the British importing grain for livestock, by this point 14 percent of British calories were coming from sugar, while the per capita consumption of bread, vegetables, and dairy products stagnated. Sugar, tobacco, coffee, and tea, all grown outside Europe, fuelled Britain's industrial labour force. The diet of the industrial worker became heavily dependent on these stimulants because it was so bereft of nutrition. Stimulants provided much needed bursts of energy during the long workdays and because they were easy to prepare and could be consumed quickly, they were well-suited to the routines of

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<sup>15</sup> “Ireland as a Food Producer – The Future of Irish Farming,” *The Economist*, September 12, 1857, pp. 1011-1012; “Ireland, A Field for Agricultural Enterprise,” *The Economist*, February 16, 1850, pp. 175-176; “Investments in Ireland,” *The Economist*, December 18, 1852, pp. 1402-1403.

<sup>16</sup> “Obstacles to High Farming – The Cultivation of Flax,” *The Economist*, February 6, 1847, pp. 145-147; “What May be Done by High Farming?,” *The Economist*, August 18, 1849, pp. 911-912; “Our Supplies of Meat,” *The Economist*, June 13, 1857, pp. 645-646; “Stock Farming or Corn Growing?,” *The Economist*, June 8, 1861, pp. 624-625; “Agricultural Notanda,” *The Economist*, December 12, 1863, pp. 1383-1384.

<sup>17</sup> “Practical Suggestions. Farm Leases,” *The Economist*, December 15, 1849, pp. 1390-1391.

increasingly disciplined work.<sup>18</sup> Britain also relied on other foodstuffs and supplies grown beyond its borders to relieve the strain of what was truly scarce in Britain – land. The transatlantic slave trade, sugar plantation system, the East India Company, and peasants around the world who were forced to grow food for export, played a crucial part in enabling Britain to exchange manufactured goods for land-intensive food and fiber at reasonable, and even falling, prices.<sup>19</sup> *The Economist* thus supported and promoted an agricultural system that catered to the rich, was based on an unquestioned faith in the benefits of trade, and depended on the state power and coercion that were necessary components of this trade system. It advocated a system of agriculture that placed risks on Britain’s own food supply, while exporting considerable ecological cost, expropriation, and famine around the world.<sup>20</sup>

Britain also relied on imports of fertilizer to improve its depleted soils. Historian Kenneth Pomeranz argued English agricultural productivity between 1750 and 1850 remained flat and the threat of decline was constant until Britain began mining, importing, and later synthesizing fertilizer. Imports of guano – nitrate-heavy sea bird droppings found mainly on the Peruvian coast – became a key characteristic of high farming in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. They did so, in part, because profit-seeking farmers who had pressed the land to its limits did not want to increase their wage bills with labour-intensive methods of restoring the soil. In a high farming system dependent on profits it, rather absurdly, became more advantageous to buy supplies from a remote source than to draw on traditional methods.<sup>21</sup>

*The Economist* championed the use of guano and other fertilizers. It claimed a “good farmer” brought guano onto his farm and argued that “good farming” did not consist in the adoption of a four-course, five-course, or any other rotation of crops, but “in the degree of

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<sup>18</sup> See Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking Penguin Inc., 1985), especially pp. 108-150, 180-186.

<sup>19</sup> Pomeranz and Topik, pp. 226-233, Pomeranz, pp. 20, 268-269, Bayly, pp. 418-449.

<sup>20</sup> Handy, *The Menace of Progress*, Ch. 2 and 3.

<sup>21</sup> Pomeranz and Topik, pp. 98, 116-119, Pomeranz, pp. 216, 224 and Daunton, p. 42.

fertility the farmer [could] maintain.”<sup>22</sup> As a “first-rate farmer” proclaimed in the paper, guano “was a godsend, a blessing conferred on farming.”<sup>23</sup> With additional supplies of manure the paper felt “the growth of corn may be enlarged to an extent that for all practical purposes we may call unlimited.”<sup>24</sup>

Imports of fertilizer grew each year: in 1841, *The Economist* noted, the quantity of fertilizer imported was only 2,881 tons, but by 1850 it had risen to no less than 116,925 tons. In 1846 a farmer commented that in many instances the farmer paid as much to the manure merchant as he did to his landlord. The paper added that sometimes a farmer paid 7 or 8 pound sterling an acre for rent and 20 pound sterling an acre for artificial manure.<sup>25</sup> While many might see this as an indication of the decline of agriculture and the inability of the land to produce crops without costly, artificial assistance, *The Economist* argued that increased importations of guano were evidence of the improved character of agriculture and a measure of the progress of British agriculture. It claimed the source of improvements in the last 20 years could be traced mainly to the *Royal Agricultural Society* and to the importation of guano.<sup>26</sup>

In hopes for easier access to more guano, *The Economist* printed and supported appeals made by agriculturalists to the British government asking for assistance in obtaining some relaxation of the Peruvian government’s monopoly of guano.<sup>27</sup> Then in the 1850s, when few new deposits of guano were being found, the paper, rather ironically, repeatedly

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<sup>22</sup> “Restrictions on Cultivation,” *The Economist*, November 11, 1848, pp. 1277-1278.

<sup>23</sup> “High Farming Profitable,” *The Economist*, November 11, 1848, p. 1278.

<sup>24</sup> “High Farming Profitable,” *The Economist*, November 11, 1848, p. 1278; “Stock Farming – Meat Supplies,” *The Economist*, July 18, 1857, pp. 786-787.

<sup>25</sup> “Game and the Game Laws,” *The Economist*, August 22, 1846, pp. 1084-1085.

<sup>26</sup> “Guano – Adulteration,” *The Economist*, September 6, 1851, p. 980; “Manure Importations,” *The Economist*, September 25, 1858, p. 1069.

<sup>27</sup> “Guano Monopoly,” *The Economist*, August, 28, 1852, p. 956; “Supply of Guano,” *The Economist*, December 10, 1853, p. 1381.

warned that farmers would do well to remember that guano could not last much longer.<sup>28</sup> As anxiety spread over indications that supplies of guano were low, it printed appeals made by the *Royal Agricultural Society* for the discovery of a manure equal in fertilizing power to guano and which might be sold at a cheaper rate.<sup>29</sup> Ultimately, the high farming system *The Economist* advocated was dependent on a finite fertilizer: Britain mined the accumulated nitrates of guano from Peru so extensively that what took thousands of years to create was gone in decades.<sup>30</sup>

Along with increased fertilizer use, *The Economist* argued high farming required more mechanization. It insisted that better tillage, not less tillage was needed as “the land ought to be forced to bear more, both of corn and stock provender, not to be allowed to go back to a state of nature.”<sup>31</sup> This was rather contradictory as increased mechanization actually interfered with preserving soil fertility in many cases; it was in part because of mechanization that increasing amounts of fertilizers were needed just to keep yields from declining.<sup>32</sup> But the paper claimed the system of deep draining and the practice of sub-soil ploughing were the new powers given to the husbandman, and necessarily added to the value of land.<sup>33</sup> It praised the advances made in steam machinery and often reported on the latest implement shows and exhibitions, including the Great Exhibition of 1851.

*The Economist* argued exhibitions were important in stimulating the improvement of machinery, as well as invigorating the agricultural mind.<sup>34</sup> Timothy Mitchell, in *Colonizing*

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<sup>28</sup> “Supply of Guano,” *The Economist*, June 12, 1852, p. 647; “Substitutes for Guano – Nitric Acid – Nitrate of Soda,” *The Economist*, January 28, 1854, pp. 87-88; “Supply of Guano,” *The Economist*, November 1, 1856, pp. 1204-1205; “Manure Importations,” *The Economist*, September 25, 1858, p. 1069.

<sup>29</sup> “Guano Substitutes,” *The Economist*, December 25, 1852, p. 1431; “Substitutes for Guano – Nitric Acid – Nitrate of Soda,” *The Economist*, January 28, 1854, pp. 87-88; “Supply of Guano,” *The Economist*, November 1, 1856, pp. 1204-1205; “Scarcity of Guano – The Uses of Light Manures,” *The Economist*, March 7, 1857, pp. 254-255.

<sup>30</sup> Pomeranz and Topik, pp. 98, 103, 116-119.

<sup>31</sup> “Retrograde Husbandry,” *The Economist*, December 28, 1850, p. 1437.

<sup>32</sup> Pomeranz, pp. 216-217.

<sup>33</sup> “Scientific Agriculture for Farmers,” *The Economist*, September 3, 1843, p. 27; “Tenant Right and Leases,” *The Economist*, February 13, 1847, pp. 175-176.

<sup>34</sup> “The Agricultural Society’s Meeting,” *The Economist*, July 24, 1847, pp. 837-838; “The Exhibition – Rural Machinery,” *The Economist*, May 10, 1851, pp. 504-505; “Agricultural Machinery at the Exhibition,” *The*

*Egypt*, noted that exhibitions brought leading men in manufactures, commerce, and science into close communication with each other, promoted the profusion of material goods, and symbolized the accomplishment of economic transformations, such as new productive relationships to the land. Exhibitions not only reflected Britain's advancement, but were the means of its production through their technique of rendering history and progress in 'objective' form. Exhibitions, Mitchell explained, were designed to create an imagined reality to substitute for a more complicated one. They fostered a veneer of modernity and by doing so helped modernity triumph.<sup>35</sup>

According to *The Economist*, the use of machinery would further Britain's progress and benefit all, including the rural poor, by inducing a larger employment of labour. Thus the paper found it curious to find a gentleman, Mr. Acton, express "a hope that all these improvements would not have the effect of displacing manual labour." This gentleman could know little of practical husbandry, *The Economist* retorted, or he would have been aware that wherever steam machinery was used on a farm, there was always more labour and better paid labour than on farms where steam labour was not employed. Improved implements afforded economy of time and money and wherever implements were used, they led to other improvements, which invariably required more labour, the paper reasoned.<sup>36</sup>

But *The Economist's* argument about labour was in direct contradiction to what it had said at other times about the relation between labour and mechanization. Presumably there would be significant labour employed in initial improvements such as draining, however, the paper had also argued that improving agriculture meant to produce more food by less labour. In another instance it argued machines and instruments should be introduced which facilitated and condensed labour. It claimed every mechanical invention set free labour that could then

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*Economist*, May 31, 1851, pp. 590-591; "Agricultural Machinery," *The Economist*, August 21, 1858, pp. 928-929.

<sup>35</sup> Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), especially pp. 7, 16-17.

<sup>36</sup> "Agricultural Machinery at the Exhibition," *The Economist*, May 31, 1851, pp. 590-591; "Steam in Husbandry," *The Economist*, May 14, 1859, pp. 535-536.

“explore the resources of Britain’s distant possessions, extend the British name, and plant new markets for British industry.”<sup>37</sup>

In reality, capitalist farmers were intent on labour-cost minimization and profit maximization. Instead of employing more labour, large farms adopted methods which raised labour productivity.<sup>38</sup> Likewise, *The Economist* was really most concerned with the productiveness of labour. It argued that machinery would allow the farmer to secure the best and most steady labourers so that with them, assisted by machinery, he might rely less on occasional and immigrant labour. The labour of the “loose” class of occasional labourers was commonly of the feeblest and least effective kind, *The Economist* claimed. These were men of “dissolute and unsteady habits,” consuming with utter improvidence the large wages they earned during the summer months and relying on poor relief in the winter. But with mowing, reaping and hay-making machines, farmers could discard the services of these “Irish reapers, militiamen, and other half-labourer, half-vagabond assistants.” The paper maintained it was the hedgers, ditchers, drainers, ploughmen, and men who could manage steam machinery and superior implements, all people who had some degree of skill and regular employment, whose labour was respectable and valuable.<sup>39</sup> Circumstances had “drawn forth the force which slumbered in the peasants’ arm; the result ha[d] been that, though the labourers [were] fewer, they ha[d] done more work than heretofore,” *The Economist* remarked.<sup>40</sup> Overall, it argued machines would better the condition of rural labourers by disciplining them – by making them skilled and by driving them to seek and retain regular employment. By employing less labour, mechanization would also drive those less skilled and less willing to adapt to the cities. The paper claimed that nothing was more conducive to the well-being of agricultural

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<sup>37</sup> “Effect of a Repeal of the Corn Laws on the Labourer,” *The Economist*, January 24, 1846, p.105; “The Scarcity of Labour – Labour, Emigration and Population,” *The Economist*, August 21, 1852, pp. 922-923; “Scarcity of Labour,” *The Economist*, September 8, 1855, pp. 979-980.

<sup>38</sup> Pomeranz, p. 216.

<sup>39</sup> “Cheap Food and Rural Wages,” *The Economist*, September 6, 1851, p. 983; “Scarcity of Harvest Labour,” *The Economist*, August 27, 1859, p. 955.

<sup>40</sup> “The Agricultural Population,” *The Economist*, June 22, 1861, pp. 680-681.



labourers than the fact that workmen of good character were being sought.<sup>41</sup> Thus it was not that mechanized farms increased the need for labour, as *The Economist* argued when belittling Mr. Acton, rather they needed fewer, but better labourers. Mechanization would both purge the countryside of improper labourers and improve those who remained.

For *The Economist*, high farming meant a system in which land was used “advantageously,” regarded as property capable of being rendered more productive by all which came under the term improvement.<sup>42</sup> In short, it claimed a modern farm using a system of high farming or “elaborate culture” was a somewhat complicated “rural manufactory of the raw materials of food.”<sup>43</sup> As *The Economist*’s manufactory of grain and meat was dependent on foreign imports, used expensive machinery, required less labour, and “presupposed a considerable amount of capital,” it was clearly not more productive or economically efficient in any sense, except a liberal economic one.<sup>44</sup>

### **Capital: ‘the deity of their idolatry’**

*The Economist* was obsessed with applying capital to the land, as many early 19<sup>th</sup> century improvers were. Preoccupied with capital, they sought to remove everything they believed stood in the way of it finding its equilibrium or ‘natural’ level. There were a few detractors, however. An English writer, under the pseudonym of Piercy Ravenstone, wrote of capital in 1821:

It serves to account for whatever cannot be accounted for in any other way. Where reason fails, where argument is insufficient, it operates like a talisman to silence all doubts. It occupies the same place in their theories, which was held by darkness in the mythology of the ancients. It is the root of all their genealogies, it is the great mother

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<sup>41</sup> “Cheap Food and Rural Wages,” *The Economist*, September 6, 1851, p. 983; “Agricultural Meetings – Progress Still Needed,” *The Economist*, September 25, 1858, pp. 1068-1069; “Scarcity of Harvest Labour,” *The Economist*, August 27, 1859, p. 955; “Agricultural Wages,” *The Economist*, April 14, 1860, p. 397; “Wages in Husbandry,” *The Economist*, April 13, 1861, pp. 400-401.

<sup>42</sup> “The Supply of Meat, Present and Prospective,” *The Economist*, December 2, 1848, pp. 1358-1359; “Profit of High Farming,” *The Economist*, December 30, 1848, pp. 1474-1475; “The State and Temper of Farmers,” *The Economist*, April 7, 1849, pp. 378-379; “The Effect of Entails on Agriculture,” *The Economist*, January 26, 1850, p. 88; “Agricultural Tendencies – Leases and Culture Stipulations,” *The Economist*, July 5, 1851, pp. 730-731; “Agricultural Notanda,” *The Economist*, December 12, 1863, pp. 1383-1384.

<sup>43</sup> “Men, Sheep or Deer? Reclamation of Wastes,” *The Economist*, March 31, 1860, pp. 340-341.

<sup>44</sup> “Compulsory Employment of Labour in Husbandry,” *The Economist*, January 2, 1847, pp. 8-9.

of all things, it is the cause of every event that happens in the world. Capital, according to them, is the parent of industry, the forerunner of all improvements. It builds our towns, it cultivates our fields . . . it bids fertility arise where all before was desolation. It is the deity of their idolatry which they have set up to worship in the high places of the Lord; and were its powers what they imagine, it would not be unworthy of their adoration.<sup>45</sup>

Ravenstone articulated well the strange paradox of capital: though itself an illusion and containing no power, though not real wealth, only a representation of wealth, its effects were everywhere felt.<sup>46</sup>

For *The Economist*, capital had nearly magical properties; it was the elixir for every problem in agriculture. The land was of far less value than it ought to be, and readily could be made by investments of capital, the paper declared.<sup>47</sup> “No one now denies that the business of husbandry in England languishes for want of capital,” it added. When *The Economist* inquired into why labourers were starving within sight of acres of land on which they might easily raise the value of their wages, its answer was that the connecting link of capital was wanting. “Before you can improve the district by uniting labour and land in the work of production, you must attract to the cultivation of that land capital in some form or other,” the paper made clear, without for a moment considering that it was this obsession with capital that prevented labourers from working the land.<sup>48</sup> Indeed, what prevented famished labourers from working the land and thus not starving, were restrictions such as *The Economist* was proposing, that saved land for capital and prevented the poor from working it.

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<sup>45</sup> Piercy Ravenstone, *A Few Doubts as to the Correctness of Some Opinions Generally Entertained on the Subjects of Population and Political Economy* (London, 1821). Cited in Pasquale Pasquino, “Theatrum Politicum: The Genealogy of Capital – Police and the State of Prosperity,” in *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 105-106. Michael Perelman suggested Ravenstone was either Edward Edwards or Richard Puller. Perelman seemed to agree with the latter. See p. 135. William Stafford also suggested Ravenstone was Richard Puller, about whom very little is known. William Stafford, *Socialism, radicalism, and nostalgia: Social criticism in Britain, 1775-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 4.

<sup>46</sup> Piercy Ravenstone, cited in Pasquale Pasquino, “Theatrum Politicum,” in *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 105-106.

<sup>47</sup> “How to Attract Capital to Land,” *The Economist*, November 20, 1847, pp. 1341-1342; “Investment of Capital in Land,” *The Economist*, May 24, 1851, pp. 564-565; “Landowning a Business,” *The Economist*, June 12, 1852, pp. 645-646.

<sup>48</sup> “Compulsory Employment of Labour in Husbandry,” *The Economist*, January 2, 1847, pp. 8-9.

The paper claimed high farming had more to do with capital than the natural quality and powers of the soil. Not surprisingly, then, those who were most successful were the men who did not hesitate to sink their capital in the soil.<sup>49</sup> These men were of the modern school and were enterprising, scientific, “go-ahead” farmers.<sup>50</sup> High farming, the paper argued, required capital and more intelligent care than that which enabled men to merely subsist. It bemoaned the fact that a large extent of land was in the occupation of tenants with little intelligence or capital, as a sure accompaniment of deficient capital was a want of enterprise. *The Economist* claimed these “low” or “routine” farmers were, compared with the active high farmers, like so many “agricultural Rip Van Winkles, who had slept for some 60 or 70 years, and who were willing to sleep on still.” The paper believed that where a farmer “ha[d] really no capital, nor the energy and intelligence necessary to acquire it, he ought not to be allowed to continue to farm.”<sup>51</sup>

Concerned about the districts where farmers were “content to plod on in a routine of husbandry little better than that pursued by their forefathers,” *The Economist* felt landowners could use their intelligence to instruct those without capital. Since “bad farming was apt to become contagious,” it required both energy and discretion on the part of a landed proprietor to originate and carry out a general system of improvement. Where there were well-cultivated farms, a thriving tenantry, and orderly and well-conditioned labourers, *The Economist* claimed there was proof that a landlord had stimulated improvement and encouraged his tenantry to apply more capital to the land.<sup>52</sup>

In another article it claimed that the greatest benefit a landlord could confer upon his tenants would be to relieve them of some portion of their farms, leaving them the homesteads,

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<sup>49</sup> “Profit of High Farming,” *The Economist*, December 30, 1848, pp. 1474-1475; “Stock Farming or Corn Growing?,” *The Economist*, June 8, 1861, pp. 624-625.

<sup>50</sup> “Profit and Loss Account in Farming,” *The Economist*, September 1, 1849, pp. 968-969.

<sup>51</sup> “Compulsory Employment of Labour in Husbandry,” *The Economist*, January 2, 1847, pp. 8-9; “Long Leases and Large Farms,” *The Economist*, February 2, 1856, pp. 114-115.

<sup>52</sup> “Compulsory Employment of Labour in Husbandry,” *The Economist*, January 2, 1847, pp. 8-9; “Leases and Capital,” *The Economist*, October 11, 1856, pp. 1121-1123.

and from one-half to two-thirds the land. They would then have a larger proportion of capital and would soon feel the benefits of high cultivation. This was a ridiculous argument by *The Economist*; the claim that taking away most of a farmer's land would benefit him because he would then have more capital was absurd and contradictory, as elsewhere the paper tenaciously opposed any division of farms into smaller holdings. *The Economist* instructed that the land taken away should be formed into one or two more farms, and should be let to men who would set an example of superior cultivation.<sup>53</sup> It went on to argue that if there were no existing capitalist landowners to teach the lessons of capital, new capitalists would have to be introduced into the business of farming.<sup>54</sup>

By attributing so much importance to capital and arguing that only an increase in capital could bring about an increase in production, the paper justified limiting access to land, reserving it for modern enterprising farmers who could apply capital to the land. This argument was, of course, fundamental to the transformation in agricultural production the paper campaigned for and key to cementing capitalist relations of production. Despite the dislocation and hardship 'routine' farmers faced, *The Economist* insisted high farming benefited everyone, including the agricultural population. It confidently claimed that as a result of high farming and free trade there were "no ruined lands, but flourishing trade, better fed people, and the most hopeful prospects."<sup>55</sup>

Yet when farmers raised alarm over the effects of free trade, particularly the low prices they were receiving for their agricultural produce, *The Economist* vigorously opposed any assistance to farmers, including abatements of rent, government regulation of prices, or tax relief. The paper alleged landlords who charged low rents were "remnants of

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<sup>53</sup> "The State and Temper of Farmers," *The Economist*, April 7, 1849, pp. 378-379.

<sup>54</sup> "Agricultural Customs Committee," *The Economist*, September 16, 1848, pp. 1051-1052.

<sup>55</sup> "Scarcity Abroad – England an Exporting Country of Wheat," *The Economist*, September 5, 1846, p. 1153; "The End of the Corn Law – Banquet at Manchester," *The Economist*, February 3, 1849, pp. 116-117; "Prospects of Free Trade in France," *The Economist*, October 23, 1858, pp. 1173-1174; "The Immense Recent Importations of Corn," *The Economist*, October 25, 1862, pp. 1179-1180.

feudalism.”<sup>56</sup> It was a dangerous delusion, it argued, for farmers to rely upon a reduction of rents in place of those improvements which would increase the quantity of produce. Reduced rents would allow farmers to carry on farming as they always had, and by permitting this “inferior race of farmers to hold land at low rents” the result would be “great national calamity.” The paper even argued that if landed property was rightly managed, simply as property, so far from any general reduction of rent being necessary, a foundation could be laid for a steady and progressive increase of rent, because it would be derived from the increased prosperity of the tenant.<sup>57</sup>

For *The Economist* higher rents had beneficial effects: they were a stimulus to improvement and would force the farmer to re-consider the terms of his holding and his system of culture, and “then he would strive to place himself in a condition to compete with the best farmers.”<sup>58</sup> High rents would, in other words, stimulate labour and encourage tenants to work harder. Likewise, the paper justified low prices by arguing that when prices were low, farmers would be ‘led’ to adopt a system of high farming, which, by intensifying production, would give them more profit than they had previously obtained under higher prices.<sup>59</sup> As well, *The Economist* reminded its readers that industry bore all burdens. A land tax impeded no industry and did not stop the creation of wealth, but a tax on wool or cotton stopped manufacture, lessened employment, and impeded national progress. Therefore, tax relief for farmers was “not feasible.”<sup>60</sup> Overall, what appeared as economic conflicts – high

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<sup>56</sup> “Bad Farming and Feudalism,” *The Economist*, February 1, 1851, p. 116.

<sup>57</sup> “The Discussion on Mr. Villier’s Motion,” *The Economist*, June 14, 1845, p. 550; “Agricultural Wages, Profits and Rents,” *The Economist*, August 2, 1845, p. 718; “Produce and Prices – A Day in Essex,” *The Economist*, June 9, 1849, pp. 631-632; “Land a Commodity,” *The Economist*, June 16, 1849, p. 659; “Rural Controversy – High Farming,” *The Economist*, September 29, 1849, pp. 1078-1079; “Reduction of Rent or Leases,” *The Economist*, November 2, 1850, p. 1213.

<sup>58</sup> “Agricultural Distress – Prices of Stock,” *The Economist*, April 28, 1849, pp. 463-464; “The True Remedy for Agricultural Distress,” *The Economist*, May 5, 1849, pp. 491-492; “Land a Commodity,” *The Economist*, June 16, 1849, p. 659; “Home Competition,” *The Economist*, July 14, 1849, pp. 770-771.

<sup>59</sup> “Profit Not Dependent on High Prices,” *The Economist*, July 20, 1850, p. 790; “Rational Estimate of Land Ownership,” *The Economist*, February 1, 1851, pp. 115-116.

<sup>60</sup> “Relief for the Agriculturalists,” *The Economist*, February 24, 1849, pp. 201-202; “Disputes Amongst the Protectionists,” *The Economist*, March 17, 1849, pp. 291-292; “The Farmers and Their Political Teachers,” *The Economist*, September 20, 1851, pp. 1036-1037.

rents, low wages – were veiled forms of pressure to induce farmers to give up their old system of farming and compel them to adjust to working for wages and procuring their goods on the market.<sup>61</sup>

Farmers also complained that while any protection to the farmer was denied, cotton and woolen manufacturers were protected against the foreigner. The simple answer to this, replied *The Economist*, was that the statement was not true. The superiority which manufacturers possessed was derived only from their own energy, perseverance, and skill.<sup>62</sup> In actuality, Britain's textile industry was created with the help of indirect wage subsidies and was sheltered from Indian imports in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries by tariffs of nearly 100 percent. Only after it had become the world's most efficient producer did it dismantle those walls. Even at the height of free trade in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Britain's Indian empire remained an important exception, with markets for various industrial goods essentially closed to the non-British.<sup>63</sup> *The Economist* thus obscured the government intervention used to assist industry and argued farmers were safe to rely only on their own skill, ingenuity, and capital. They only had to set about farming "the same way and in the same spirit as the factory people set about manufactures and they could defy the competition of the world." According to the paper, they would succeed if they entered "heartily into the great industrial movement commenced by the commercial classes" and regarded land as "an object of commercial enterprise, to be managed solely with a view to profit."<sup>64</sup>

Although *The Economist* claimed it was a voice of reason, its arguments regarding high agriculture were often contradictory and illogical. What was clear, however, was that this system of farming was intended to remove those who did not have the means to farm

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<sup>61</sup> Polanyi, p. 293.

<sup>62</sup> "Backwards or Forwards?," *The Economist*, April 26, 1851, pp. 449-451; "The Old Plea for a Duty on Corn," *The Economist*, June 26, 1852, p. 697.

<sup>63</sup> See Blaut, p. 203, Goody, p. 131, Polanyi, p. 139, Pomeranz and Topik, p. 219 and Ross, p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> "Agricultural Distress – Prices of Stock," *The Economist*, April 28, 1849, pp. 463-464; "The True Remedy for Agricultural Distress," *The Economist*, May 5, 1849, pp. 491-492; "Land a Commodity," *The Economist*, June 16, 1849, p. 659; "Home Competition," *The Economist*, July 14, 1849, pp. 770-771.

highly. Despite all evidence that this mode of production was not logical or favorable for everyone, the paper spread faith in it by praising its productive superiority and victory over nature, hunger, ignorance and tradition. It extolled the virtues of fertilizer, mechanization, and capital and claimed that under high farming, “agriculture advanced far more rapidly than it would have done in the hands of small farmers.”<sup>65</sup>

### **The Ideal Size of Farm**

To continue its rationalization of capitalist agriculture, and inequality, the paper engaged in frequent discussions on the ideal size of farms, seeking to prove why England’s large estates were superior to small farms. *The Economist* began these discussions with a series of articles in the late 1840s that focused on refuting the arguments of M. Passy and his work *Large and Small Farms, and their Influence on the Social Economy*. A former Minister of Commerce in France, Passy detailed a number of criticisms of large farms that became more common a century and a half later when people began to try to explain the failure of development strategies in underdeveloped countries, strategies that had borrowed much from the British example.

Passy questioned the belief that a small number of cultivators indicated a high standard of farming. Was it desirable that farming should only occupy a few families while other industries employed proportionally more, he asked? If the least advanced countries only displayed a small degree of industrial life and activity, he argued it was not, as had been supposed, because agriculture occupied too many hands, but because the skill and resources applicable to other enterprises were wanting. Passy also disagreed with the argument that large farms contributed more than small ones to the well-being of the labourers they employed. Rather, he pointed out, on large farms there were few masters and many labourers; on small farms there were more of the former and fewer of the latter. Controlling their own

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<sup>65</sup> “Some Considerations on the Size of Farms,” *The Economist*, October 30, 1847, pp. 1245-1247.

farm, though small, provided farmers with independence and elevated their social position, while it insured that there was little social difference between the farmer and his labourers. In all, Passy was arguing for an integrated agricultural system that reduced class differences. This was in direct opposition to *The Economist's* preference for a system that increased class differences and created a mobile, but controlled, labour force. Passy's claim disputed the paper's argument that constant and regularly paid agricultural wages would do more for the comfort and advancement of labourers than the "precarious independence" of peasant farming.<sup>66</sup>

Passy also maintained that changes to England's agricultural system, by depopulating the countryside, reduced the number of rural consumers for England's manufactures. With a system of cultivation that would support more labourers, he argued England would have attained an equal prosperity and would not have left "the masses exposed to numerous sufferings upon that very soil where are collected the most colossal capitals that ever vivified and remunerated labour."<sup>67</sup> He felt it was a mistake to assume that the fewer hands the earth employed, the more would be left to be employed in trade and commerce, or that the fewer cultivators there were in a country, that manufactures would then thrive. This challenged *The Economist's* argument that shifting labour from agriculture to manufactures relieved the land and resulted in Britain's freedom and prosperity.

Passy believed the support for inequality espoused by *The Economist* was partly the result of a prejudice for the 'order' evident in large farms in opposition to the 'disorder' inherent in peasant production, regardless of differences in productivity:

Great farms have, above all others, in their exterior aspect, wherewithal to beget a prejudice in their favour. Owing to the considerable capitals which they require, the persons who hold them, rich and well educated, have habits and tastes of a higher order; and everything connected with their domestic arrangements attests a superiority, which is presumed to extend to their system of farming. And, then, those

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<sup>66</sup> "Influence of the Size of Farms on Social Economy," *The Economist*, November 6, 1847, pp. 1276-1277; "The Productiveness of Large and Small Farms," *The Economist*, November 25, 1848, pp. 1330-1331.

<sup>67</sup> "Influence of the Size of Farms on Social Economy," *The Economist*, November 6, 1847, pp. 1276-1277.



immense fields sown entirely with one kind of crop – those vast inclosures in pasture where a number of animals are fed – that plurality of labourers engaged on every piece of work – all these appearances are associated with ideas of order, activity and abundance, delight the eye of the observer, and cannot fail to leave a favourable impression. . . . Great farms possess an advantage which often manifests itself in the most striking and attractive manner.<sup>68</sup>

*The Economist's* response to such criticisms was primarily to argue that the changes to English agriculture were natural and beneficial, the result of the increased application of capital to land. An increase in the size of farms was the natural tendency of increasing wealth and prosperity, the paper claimed. Large farms were simply evidence of a general progress, proof that the middle and upper classes were advancing in opulence.<sup>69</sup> That the labouring classes did not advance with them, that they multiplied even faster than the new arts could provide for them, was “not the consequence of the extinction of small farmers, but of other circumstances.” Large farms did not cause the poverty of labourers, in fact, it claimed, without the wealth large farms created, and without employment in manufactures, the labouring classes would either have multiplied much more slowly, or they would have been a great deal more degraded than they had become under the consolidation of land.<sup>70</sup>

Fortunately for England, commerce and manufactures had been opened to her people and they had “swarmed from the land into towns”; they had left agriculture for other means of subsistence and the land “remained divided into useful, convenient, and profitable portions.” For if there were no other occupations than farming open to men, they would fight or murder one another for possession of land, which would end in a minute subdivision of the soil, such as had taken place in France and Ireland. The only means of counteracting such powerful motives, the paper claimed, was to remove every restraint from industry and to set trade entirely free. Thankfully the English had done this, *The Economist* noted, and were “not

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<sup>68</sup> “Influence of the Size of Farms on Social Economy,” *The Economist*, November 6, 1847, pp. 1276-1277.

<sup>69</sup> “Good Farming – The Helps and Hindrances,” *The Economist*, May 4, 1861, pp. 484-485.

<sup>70</sup> “Large or Small Farms,” *The Economist*, February 12, 1848, pp. 173-174.

huted on the soil, as in Ireland,” they had “not cut it up into roods, as in France,” and had not turned “every park in the empire into potato gardens.”<sup>71</sup>

*The Economist* added that the genius of the people had much to do with determining their system of husbandry. “The English farmer was not content to expend so much skill and energy for the sake of such a bare subsistence as must ever be the lot of the small farmer.”<sup>72</sup> The paper argued England’s division of classes into landowners, tenants and labourers was “an important onward step in the progress of civilization,” although that division had “not yet produced all the good it was capable of producing.” It felt the arrangement of England’s agricultural classes into labourers for hire and capitalist occupiers of land who hired labour, was likely to be permanent. It even went so far to say that this arrangement was not unsuited to the best interests of the labourers, as it was unquestionably the arrangement best adapted to advance the arts of husbandry and consequently large and cheap production.<sup>73</sup> This was a clear attempt by the paper to make more palatable the non-voluntary division of labour.

Not only were large farms a natural result of progress and increased prosperity, and beneficial to labourers, but according to *The Economist*, “it was utterly impossible to fix any rule for the size of farms.” The paper argued the size of farms should be left to the decision of the individuals owning the land who, if left in perfect freedom, would do what was most profitable to them and thus what was best for the public.<sup>74</sup> Trying to regulate the size of farms would only do more harm than good. In short, *The Economist* was for settling the land entirely free from any laws. “An absolute individual property in the soil, completely

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<sup>71</sup> “The Influence of Manufactures and Commerce on the Division of the Soil,” *The Economist*, January 15, 1848, pp. 61-62. A rood was an Anglo-Saxon land measurement equivalent to about ¼ acre.

<sup>72</sup> “Some Considerations on the Size of Farms,” *The Economist*, October 30, 1847, pp. 1245-1247; “Science Applied to Agriculture – Large and Small Farms,” *The Economist*, December 17, 1853, pp. 1411-1412; “Long Leases and Large Farms,” *The Economist*, February 2, 1856, pp. 114-115; “Good Farming – The Helps and Hindrances,” *The Economist*, May 4, 1861, pp. 484-485.

<sup>73</sup> “The Productiveness of Large and Small Farms,” *The Economist*, November 25, 1848, pp. 1330-1331; “The Royal Agricultural Society’s Meeting,” *The Economist*, July 27, 1850, pp. 818-819.

<sup>74</sup> “Ireland – The Continuation of Social Evils,” *The Economist*, July 31, 1847, p. 862; “Laws of Succession to Property,” *The Economist*, January 22, 1848, pp. 88-89.

unfettered,” seemed to the paper “to be consistent with reason and principle, and social progress.”<sup>75</sup>

*The Economist* seemed to forget it had argued for only one type of land ownership – large capitalized farms – against other types. The paper obscured the process by which England and Ireland came to have large capitalized estates; the consolidation of land had occurred not through some magic of the market but through Parliamentary acts. It justified inequality by claiming it was a necessary stimulant to improvement and labour. Furthermore, by portraying capital as having a fair and objective rule, and by arguing it was impossible to regulate the size of farms, the paper made an inequitable system seem natural and inevitable.

To further prove the superiority of England’s large estates, *The Economist* often commented on the condition of the population in Ireland and France which “was so exclusively dependent on the land for subsistence.” As a result, it claimed, the peasants in France were un-enterprising, un-improving, ignorant and poor. France’s “infinitesimal patches of land” were cultivated in an uneconomical fashion, using spades and hoes, producing no profit.<sup>76</sup> The French, the paper maintained, were at least a century behind England in agricultural science and skill; in France, agriculture was a handicraft rather than what it ought to be – a science. Their style of husbandry was slovenly, their corn crops were by no means free from weeds, and the untidiness and discomfort of their dwellings could scarcely be exceeded. Their habits were extremely penurious, they used much of their produce for food and clothing, they mainly subsisted on coarse vegetables rather than bread or meat, and they hoarded whatever money they could save.<sup>77</sup> In all, the French were “bound down in the most abject submission to every custom, for no other reason than that it [was] a custom.” There was “no struggling upwards, no longing for a better condition, no discontent

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<sup>75</sup> “Tenant-Right – Ireland,” *The Economist*, September 25, 1847, pp. 1101-1102.

<sup>76</sup> “French Husbandry,” *The Economist*, September 13, 1851, pp. 1012-1013, citing the *Morning Chronicle*.

<sup>77</sup> “French Husbandry – The Valley of the Isere – Grenoble,” *The Economist*, October 13, 1855, pp. 1123-1124; “Husbandry in France,” *The Economist*, October 31, 1857, p. 1205; “French Agriculture,” *The Economist*, April 10, 1858, pp. 395-396.

even with the vegetable food upon which they lived. All over the land there brooded one almost unvaried mist of dull, unenlightened, passive content.”<sup>78</sup> *The Economist* argued the French example proved to all countries that a minute subdivision of the soil and encouraging the bulk of the population to become, or remain as agriculturists, would only lead to bad farming and idleness.<sup>79</sup>

What the paper found particularly repugnant about subsistence farming was the “spirit of thrift” that diffused through the rural population. Peasants, it argued, denied themselves “reasonable indulgencies” and “lived wretchedly, in order to economize.” Among the French, the family of the peasant engaged in self-provisioning and produced nearly all they consumed. This was a social state, *The Economist* remarked, which afforded no markets and no class wealthy enough to employ a class of producers of objects for them to purchase. The effect was that it obliterated those branches of industry which produced the luxuries and elegancies of a civilized life and, in the end, would lead to the extinction of foreign commerce. As the paper noted:

when we examine the household life of a Swiss, German or Auvergne peasant owner . . . these people are clothed, not in cotton from England nor in linen from Belgium, but in linen or woolen garments which are the produce of their own farms and their own looms; they consume no tea from China, no cigars from Cuba or Louisiana, no sugar from the West Indies, little coffee from the East; their tobacco is raised at home; their coffee is half chicory; their sugar is manufactured from beet-root; and their bad beer and sour wine are the growth of their own hop-garden and vineyard.<sup>80</sup>

Peasant proprietors were unacceptable, therefore, because they threatened the health of both national and international trade. As *The Economist* had already proved to itself the benefits of trade, no matter what was being traded, the self-provisioning of peasants, by definition, needed to lead to impoverishment and stagnation. It argued a system of small ownerships was directly at variance with the principle of political economy which proclaimed that the division

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<sup>78</sup> “French Husbandry,” *The Economist*, September 13, 1851, pp. 1012-1013.

<sup>79</sup> “Succession to Property,” *The Economist*, December 18, 1847, pp. 1447-1448; “Cause of Revolutions in France,” *The Economist*, December 16, 1854, pp. 1372-1373.

<sup>80</sup> “Collateral Evils of Peasant Proprietorship,” *The Economist*, October 18, 1851, pp. 1149-1151.

of labour was essential to full efficiency of production. For the paper, any system in which farmers acted uneconomically, or made non-market decisions regarding production, was archaic and not synonymous with improvement. It claimed the whole division of land and establishment of people without capital on small farms was an “irrational custom.”<sup>81</sup> Equally, the peasant proprietor was irrational, as he never calculated that he could procure in the market two bushels of grain for the price in seed and labour, when it only produced him one bushel on his own patch of land, and he never considered the wages which he would have received for half the amount of toil on the farm of a larger and wealthier proprietor.<sup>82</sup> In all, the extra labour the peasant and his family bestowed upon their land was less effective than it would be if otherwise applied. In this simple consideration lay, *The Economist* maintained, “the key to the whole mystery – the solution of one of the knottiest, most vital, and most interesting problems propounded to the nineteenth century.”<sup>83</sup>

*The Economist* did admit that possibly a certain number of small farms could be beneficial as stepping stones, allowing frugal and intelligent agricultural labourers to rise to the rank of farmers. However, these farmers needed to have the lessons provided by neighbouring large farms constantly at hand. If the small farmer could only grow 25 bushels of wheat to the acre, while a large farmer grew 35 or 40 bushels, the small farmer had to “go to the wall” for he would not be able to pay the rent his land would be worth in the hands of a better cultivator. “He must learn what his more opulent neighbours are doing and act accordingly”; his continued existence depended on his own progression, the paper maintained.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> “Laws of Succession to Property,” *The Economist*, January 22, 1848, pp. 88-89, “Large or Small Farms,” *The Economist*, February 12, 1848, pp. 173-174; “Allotment Farming in Hertfordshire,” *The Economist*, June 24, 1848, p. 707.

<sup>82</sup> “The Vexed Question of Peasant Proprietorship,” *The Economist*, November 8, 1851, pp. 1230-1232.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> “Small Farms – Peasant Proprietors,” *The Economist*, September 11, 1847, pp. 1052-1053; “The Productiveness of Large and Small Farms,” *The Economist*, November 25, 1848, pp. 1330-1331; “The Royal Agricultural Society’s Meeting,” *The Economist*, July 27, 1850, pp. 818-819; “Science Applied to Agriculture – Large and Small Farms,” *The Economist*, December 17, 1853, pp. 1411-1412.

*The Economist* denounced the security associated with the ownership of small plots as degenerating into poverty and destitution. It claimed that because proprietors of small farms did not follow the principles of political economy they were ignorant and irrational, satisfied, and too little enamoured with consumption. Inadequate consumption and self-provisioning, of course, were key barriers to the extension of a capitalist mode of production. They were in direct opposition to *The Economist's* preference for a division of labour that prevented people from directly providing for themselves, forcing them become dependent on the market for their daily needs.

Once the rural poor in England had been dislodged from their 'irrational' methods of 'routine' farming, dispossessed of land, and made dependent on the market, nothing was to interfere with the free working of the market. Instead, society was to be shaped in such a manner as to allow the market to function according to its own laws.<sup>85</sup> Thus *The Economist* sought every possible opportunity to promote the new social division of labour and to engage people in productive work that would turn a profit for employers. It stood on guard to ensure capitalist relations of production became firmly entrenched, hence, when measures were suggested that would support the rural poor's ability to provide for themselves, the paper expressed an unremitting hostility toward them. *The Economist* was especially opposed to a scheme of garden allotments for the rural poor.

### **Garden allotments: a 'dangerous and degrading scheme'**

Between 1830 and 1850 there was a movement to reallocate small portions of land to the rural poor in the form of garden allotments. Allotments in England originated as a response to the food shortages experienced during the Napoleonic Wars. By 1830 the 'Captain Swing' riots drew attention to the condition of agricultural labourers, who had launched a campaign for agricultural reform. In its aftermath, hundreds were "transported" to

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<sup>85</sup> Polanyi, p. 57.

Australia for real or alleged participation in the riots. The riots, however, also prompted the promotion of allotments as a plausible remedy for rural poverty and unrest.<sup>86</sup>

Garden allotments were one of the most efficient cases of self-provisioning. They were between one-eighth and half an acre, used low-capital, labour intensive methods such as spade culture, and employed whole families in producing potatoes and other vegetables. Allotments were used for subsistence; rarely, did labourers sell part of their produce. They were economical and part of their advantage was the avoidance of the need to transport and market produce, which grew near the point of consumption.<sup>87</sup>

Allotments were one of the few post-enclosure alternatives or supplements to wage labour available to the rural poor. In fact, contemporary observers often saw the rise of allotments as a response to enclosure, and as performing a role comparable to common rights before enclosure. All of the select committees and royal commissions which remarked on allotments, and most of the national and local press, were in favour of them as a remedy for alleviating rural poverty.<sup>88</sup> John E. Archer argued that landowners were in favour of allotments because they would keep labourers from becoming dependent on the Poor Law. Boaz Moselle contended that when prices for agricultural produce were low, labourers could use small pieces of land more efficiently than farmers – so much more, in fact, that the gain from giving land to labourers outweighed the potential subsidy from using poor relief.<sup>89</sup> Others saw allotments as a valuable aid in forming moral character. Initially allotments were given to the ‘deserving poor’ who demonstrated standards of honesty, industriousness and respectability, though they were occasionally offered to applicants of bad character in order to

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<sup>86</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm and George Rude, *Captain Swing: A social history of the great English agricultural uprising of 1830* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company Inc., 1968) and Ross, p. 26.

<sup>87</sup> Perelman, pp. 95, 118. See “The Agricultural Labourer and the Regulations Imposed in the Allotment System,” *The Economist*, December 21, 1844, pp. 1539-1541 for a detailed description of conditions, rules and regulations on allotments.

<sup>88</sup> See “1843 Select Committee on Allotments” cited in Boaz Moselle, “Allotments, enclosure, and proletarianization in early nineteenth-century southern England,” *Economic History Review*, XLVIII (3) (1995): 482-483.

<sup>89</sup> “The Allotment System,” *The Economist*, March 8, 1845, p. 218; John E. Archer, “The nineteenth-century allotment: half an acre and a row,” *Economic History Review*, 50 (1) (1997), pp. 21-36 and Moselle, p. 489.

show the reforming powers of the system. As allotments became more general, however, stringent morality assessments became less important and land was made available to anyone who wanted it, though demand outstripped their supply.<sup>90</sup>

While allotments provided a solution to the hardships the rural poor faced, they were also a source of contention. Jeremy Burchardt, a leading authority on the English allotment movement, argued opposition to allotments amongst landowners was largely confined to those who felt an ideological commitment to political economy. Political economists and their landowning followers objected to the provision of land for labourers arguing that it was a retrogressive plan with too much a resemblance to other “modes of disinterring feudal habits and feelings,” that it was “a sort of supplementary poor law,” and that it would be “the first step towards introducing the ruinous and depraved method of dealing with the land which had produced such evil results in Ireland.”<sup>91</sup> They maintained it disturbed the clarity of the functional division between labourers, farmers, and landowners, and kept labourers reliant on land when they should depend on wages. Most alarmingly, some argued allotments would increase population. It was assumed that if labourers had land their better economic position would lead to earlier marriages and a rising birth rate. Their offspring would choose to stay on the land, resulting in even greater subdivision of holdings and ultimately a ‘cottier population.’ Thomas Malthus, one of the most ardent defenders of private property, argued that if a system of allotments was made general it would result in a subdivision of holdings, a decline in the standard of living, and a catastrophic increase in population.<sup>92</sup>

Some farmers also opposed allotments fearing labourers would expend all their strength on their plots. Still, many farmers assisted labourers with cultivation of their plots.

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<sup>90</sup> Correspondence from Robert Hyde Greg – “The Allotment System,” *The Economist*, November 16, 1844, p. 1426. Also see Archer, pp. 27-29.

<sup>91</sup> M. P. J. A. Roebuck in Jeremy Burchardt, “Land, Labour, and Politics: Parliament and Allotment Provision, 1830-1870,” in *Agriculture and Politics in England, 1815-1939*, edited by J. R. Wordie (Houndmills: Macmillan, 2000), p. 112.

<sup>92</sup> Jeremy Burchardt, “Rural Social Relations, 1830-50: Opposition to Allotments for Labourers,” *The Agricultural History Review*, 45 (2) (1997), p. 166 and Burchardt, “Land, Labour, and Politics: Parliament and Allotment Provision, 1830-1870,” p. 103.



Any hostility principally came out of a desire to keep labourers in a dependent economic position and to maintain a status distinction between themselves and labourers. Overall, however, there was little to suggest that farmers or farming were seriously affected by the introduction of allotments.<sup>93</sup>

The allotment movement gained considerable political prominence from 1843 to 1845 and it was during this period that *The Economist* devoted many articles to the issue. The paper denounced the allotment scheme as a “popular panacea for all the labourer’s ills.” It was a “dangerous and degrading scheme, fraught with the most serious and frightful consequences,” it claimed. Though it was popular and might initially “heal the surface of the sore,” the paper argued the “rancorous venom” would effectually eat to the centre of the system.<sup>94</sup>

*The Economist*’s objection to the allotment system was chiefly grounded on its tendency to “stagnate labour” and thus obstruct the labour market. The paper argued that if extensively carried out, allotments would fix the labouring class to a particular spot and would accumulate labourers where they were already in superabundance. The consequence would be to further reduce wages in these districts and deprive the country of “so much productiveness in other pursuits in which it might be profitable.” It argued labourers’ welfare depended on their being able to freely circulate to those areas most needing their labour.<sup>95</sup>

Not only would allotments prevent the mobility of labour, but like the political economists of the age, the paper claimed they would keep labourers dependent on land rather than regular employment and wages. *The Economist* was in favour of cottage gardens filled with hollyhocks, sunflowers, and lavender as they were possessed for pleasure and demonstrated an advanced stage of comfort, prudence, and an elevated character. But the

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<sup>93</sup> See Burchardt, “Rural Social Relations, 1830-50: Opposition to Allotments for Labourers,” pp. 165-175; Moselle, pp. 482-500 and Archer, pp. 21-36.

<sup>94</sup> “The Labourer’s Panacea – The Allotment System,” *The Economist*, November 2, 1844, p. 1369.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

allotment system demonstrated the opposite, it insisted. In place of flowers were grown “rows of ill-cultivated potatoes, or other matter-of-fact vegetables.” Allotments, with their “character of stern utility, of substitute for wages, of last source of subsistence,” were evidence of “the deepest poverty and the last stage of dependence,” it claimed. While the cottager’s garden was a comfort which he commanded in addition to, and by consequence of his earnings, allotments were a substitution for regular employment and wages.<sup>96</sup>

*The Economist* strongly felt labourers should depend more on wages and less on the yield of their own small plot of soil.<sup>97</sup> Labourers in England, it argued, could not draw from the cultivation of small allotments of land, unaided by implements, manure, draining, and other improvements, an income equal to the wages they received by combining their labour with a farmer’s capital.<sup>98</sup> Labour was always more productive when combined with capital, “than when left to its own clumsy and unassisted expedients.” *The Economist* maintained that as long as there were cultivators with capital to pay money-wages, any pursuit for which the labourer was not paid should be instantly abandoned.<sup>99</sup>

*The Economist* also argued allotments unjustifiably interfered with property and led to the tendency of an agrarian law which was inconsistent with that which increased production – the division of labour. Agricultural improvement and extension in the size of farms, it maintained, had made the division of labour much more perfect, but the effect of allotments would be that a man might work ten hours a day on a large farm at hedging or ploughing, and complete his day by working two hours on his allotment, not doing what he was most skilled, but doing a little of everything. Those two hours, *The Economist* pointed out, would not be as

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<sup>96</sup> “The Agricultural Labourer and the Regulations Imposed in the Allotment System,” *The Economist*, December 21, 1844, pp. 1539-1540.

<sup>97</sup> “Division of Labour – The Allotment System,” *The Economist*, November 23, 1844, pp. 1441-1443; Letter to the Editor – “Mr Greg on Allotments,” *The Economist*, November 23, 1844, pp. 1450-1451; “The Agricultural Labourer and the Regulations Imposed in the Allotment System,” *The Economist*, December 21, 1844, pp. 1539-1541.

<sup>98</sup> “The Sugar Debate in the Lords – Competition Between Slave and Free Labour,” *The Economist*, August 15, 1846, pp. 1050-1051.

<sup>99</sup> “The Labourer’s Panacea – The Allotment System,” *The Economist*, November 2, 1844, p. 1369.

productive or profitable as if he had worked 12 hours on the farm. The real sin, however, was that the labourer would reserve some of his strength for the cultivation of his allotment, and thus his employer would not “have all the sweat of his brow.”<sup>100</sup>

For *The Economist*, the only way labourers could be elevated was through constant waged work.<sup>101</sup> It believed labourers’ poverty was due to insufficient employment, and that to allow people the means to produce for their own needs would only generate a widespread pattern of indolence. *The Economist* feared labourers would rather engage in self-provisioning than participate in the labour market; an increasing number of people employed in self-sufficient farming would reduce the number available for the production of surplus, and profits would suffer as a result of a return to spade husbandry.<sup>102</sup> Thus it lashed out at the scheme of allotments as nothing less than an assault on civilization and portrayed anyone who resisted wage labour as an enemy of progress. The proponents of allotments, it claimed, opposed “the development of society,” would “doom the people to ignorance and slavery,” and “prohibit them from profiting by the splendid discoveries of modern intellect.”<sup>103</sup> It even argued that the allotment system was one of the causes of the downfall of the Roman Empire and a reason for the French Revolution. History demonstrated, *The Economist* believed, that allotments would inevitably result in having food doled out to people as beggars, as in Rome, or, they would rise up and take the land with vengeance and violence as had happened in France.<sup>104</sup>

*The Economist* did later admit, in 1859, that well-managed allotments formed a means of improving the condition of the agricultural labourer. But, it made clear, only when allotments were skillfully managed with much judgment and care did they become valuable.

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<sup>100</sup> “Division of Labour – The Allotment System,” *The Economist*, November 23, 1844, pp. 1441-1443.

<sup>101</sup> “Potato Allotments,” *The Economist*, November 7, 1846, pp. 1455-1456.

<sup>102</sup> See Perelman, pp. 284, 311.

<sup>103</sup> Letter to Editor – “Allotments and Free Trade,” *The Economist*, December 14, 1844, p. 1520; Literature – “The Mother Country; or, The Spade, the Wastes, and the Eldest Son. An Examination of the Condition of England,” *The Economist*, November 24, 1849, pp. 1309-1310.

<sup>104</sup> “Food is Power,” *The Economist*, November 23, 1844, p. 1443; Letter to the Editor – “Mr. Greg on Allotments,” *The Economist*, November 23, 1844, pp. 1450-1451.

It praised an example of an allotment field in Whitfield in which plots were offered according to labourers' ability, not according to their need, and where some competition was found necessary to keep up the system.<sup>105</sup>

### **Poverty as a Source of Wealth**

For *The Economist*, self-provisioning was nothing more than a residue of a savage past and it fought vehemently to prevent any attempts to ameliorate poverty using measures it felt were inconsistent with the modern-day principles of political economy. It denounced all activity that did not conform to the norm of production by wage labour and denied the legitimacy and logic of any alternative vision of production. At the same time, *The Economist's* own vision of agricultural production was illogical and filled with contradictions. Though it claimed to espouse the principles of laissez faire, the paper was unwilling to rely on market forces to determine the division of labour. It found the tenacity of the rural poor to engage in self-provisioning and their reluctance to work for wages particularly distasteful. That is, when the rural poor were 'free to choose' what in their minds was the most productive use of their labour, they almost always made the wrong choice and needed to be compelled to wage labour. To make sure they accepted wage labour and would be unable to exist outside the market, *The Economist* championed an agricultural system that called for state interventions and blatant manipulations of the division of labour to restrict the rural poor's ability to provide for their own needs. This was a story of coercion through policies which made a continuation of the old ways impossible and created a state of deprivation, even while *The Economist* claimed its vision of rural change would benefit all.

It was believed that once those who had engaged in self-provisioning became sufficiently impoverished, they would have no choice but to accept wage labour. As a result, this created poverty did not reflect a disadvantage for capitalist development; rather, it was an

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<sup>105</sup> "Agricultural Social Economy," *The Economist*, November 27, 1858, pp. 1319-1320; "The Allotment System," *The Economist*, September 17, 1859, pp. 1039-1040.

important tool for organizing society to its own interests. Patrick Colquhoun, a London police magistrate noted:

Poverty is that state and condition in society where the individual has no . . . means of subsistence but what is derived from the constant exercise of industry in the various occupations of life. Poverty is therefore a most necessary and indispensable ingredient in society . . . It is the source of wealth, since without poverty, there could be no labour; there could be no riches, no refinement, no comfort, and no benefit to those who may be possessed of wealth.<sup>106</sup>

Separating people from the means of production was an ongoing process but a necessary precondition for the creation of labourers. Still, formerly independent farmers resisted severing their ties with agriculture. They did not move easily to a new mode of production nor did they gladly adopt the role of low-paid agricultural or factory worker. As the market was incapable of breaking down resistance to wage labour, measures were needed to force those who once engaged in self-provisioning to be integrated into the market. Though *The Economist* embraced the proposition that once ‘freed’ from their ties to the land, rational people understood the benefits of wage labour and were naturally disciplined to the market, it went to great lengths to support the institutions of society that would eliminate remnants of the preexisting mode of production and foster submission to wage labour. The next chapter makes this contradiction clearer.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Patrick Colquhoun, *Treatise on the wealth, power, and resources of the British empire in every quarter of the world, including the East Indies*. (London: Joseph Mawman, 1815. New York: Johnson Reprint, 1965), p. 110. Also cited in Perelman, p. 23.

<sup>107</sup> See Perelman, pp. 4-6, 93-94, 124, 245, 269, 361.

### CHAPTER THREE - 'Drawing Forth the Force Which Slumbers in the Peasants' Arm'

In the wake of several centuries of harsh methods of primitive accumulation, the 19<sup>th</sup> century wage relationship seemed a voluntary affair. In reality, the underlying process was far from voluntary. Karl Polanyi argued that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a new institutional mechanism was starting to act on England – the establishment of the self-regulating market economy. The intent was that society would be re-ordered so that the market could operate freely, and more and more aspects of life would be subordinated to the interests of capital. In order to accomplish this, measures were needed that would discipline labour to the market, increase the quantity of labour and improve its efficiency, and train people to have more needs.<sup>1</sup>

Another important component was that society needed to remove the long held belief that poor relief was the right of those who had no subsistence. The poor had lost rights to subsistence through the enclosure movement and their common rights were criminalized throughout much of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>2</sup> Both enclosures and the criminalization of common rights were forms of social control, based on a belief that it was necessary to induce the poor to labour and regulate their labour. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century all that remained of the idea that the poor had any right to subsistence were the Poor Laws; the focus of much of 19<sup>th</sup> century political economy became an attack on these laws. Political economists were assisted by the Reverend Thomas Malthus who, perhaps, provided the most persuasive argument for an attack on the poor's last entitlement – an argument based on a paranoid fear that the poor had a tendency to propagate and any assistance would, by alleviating their poverty, allow them to continue to breed, thus increasing misery. Political economy became obsessed with the dangerous class of the poor: the non-labouring poor, or paupers.<sup>3</sup> According to Gertrude

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<sup>1</sup> Polanyi, pp. 40-43 and Perelman, pp. 15, 125.

<sup>2</sup> See Linebaugh, *The London Hanged*.

<sup>3</sup> Ross, pp. 11, 14-16 and Handy, *The Menace of Progress*, Ch. 2.

Himmelfarb, paupers were seen as dangerous because they represented a “perverse refusal to abide by the ethos” of the new rationality of wage labour.<sup>4</sup>

Michel Foucault also maintained the pre-industrial solidarities of the poor were a danger as they represented an “anti-society” which blocked the free circulation of labour and capital through their “chronic deficit of interest,” their “refusal to make the passage from penury to well-being,” and their stubborn indifference to regular wages, increased labour, and expanded consumption. The poor, in other words, represented the threat of under-consumption; they embodied the danger of subversion by their refusal to move from self-provisioning to wage labour, and they endangered the system of capitalism itself. Foucault argued that in order to turn the poor into individuals concerned with their own well-being and upward mobility, modern mentalities had to be implanted within them through ‘governmentality’. These mentalities were cultivated in people through subtle ‘disciplinary mechanisms’ or ‘techniques of government’. Disciplinary mechanisms, such as education, shaped, guided, and corrected the conduct of a population and fostered self-discipline. Though they assumed the happiness and well-being of people as their end, ultimately they were designed to form ‘proper’ or ‘good’ citizens. Timothy Mitchell argued this process of building citizens was a kind of colonialism wherein the power of the state was diffused as it infiltrated and re-ordered the population.<sup>5</sup> It was this political process – a process of primitive accumulation – that accompanied the 19<sup>th</sup> century capitalist transformation of rural England.<sup>6</sup>

*The Economist*’s concerns fit into a tradition of fear and concern about the poor. The paper was interested in the creation of a labour force that was disciplined to the market, but was unwilling to leave the fate of capitalism to market forces as it did not trust the free choice

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<sup>4</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Vintage Books, 1983), pp. 101, 523-527.

<sup>5</sup> See Colin Gordon, “Government rationality: an introduction,” pp. 10, 38, Foucault, “Governmentality,” pp. 87-104 and Procacci, “Social economy and the government of poverty,” in *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 155-158 as well as Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, pp. 33-35.

<sup>6</sup> Marx, pp. 899-900.

of the rural poor. They were irrational and ignorant of their own misery, the paper claimed, and their stubborn reliance on traditional solidarities, their limited material needs, and resistance to the approved norm of production by wage labour were evidence of their moral defectiveness.

*The Economist*, though a proponent of laissez faire, supported the techniques of government described by Foucault. It did so by claiming the rural poor would benefit from education, ‘decent’ homes, and a strict administration of the Poor Law. This chapter argues these were spaces that would shape the behaviour of the rural poor, coaching them to a discipline of work, frugality, sobriety, and good order. These disciplinary mechanisms were to transform them into ‘good’ citizens – citizens that could be integrated into a modern national economy. Because it was not the rural poor *The Economist* wrote for, the paper sought to convince its influential readers – government and business leaders – of the need to press forward and ensure that the rural poor had no alternative but to embrace wage labour. *The Economist* hoped to restrict the rural poor’s ability to promote “counter-conducts”, or forms of behaviour that were not amenable to capitalist relations of production.

### **Developing ‘a taste for labour’**

To justify the subjection of the rural poor to harsh measures of discipline and control, *The Economist* invoked the need to stamp out sloth and indolence. It repeatedly portrayed the rural poor as slow to change, ignorant, “rough” and “not . . . the clearest headed members of the community.”<sup>7</sup> It claimed they were idle, rebellious, sentimental, and improvident. The paper denounced this behaviour, because it endangered the working of the market, and blamed the rural poor for holding back Britain’s progress. In order for capitalism to advance and Britain to develop, it argued the rural poor either needed to be coerced into more effective

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<sup>7</sup> “The Anti-Corn Law League,” *The Economist*, November 2, 1844, pp. 1372-1373; “Ancient and Modern,” *The Economist*, December 10, 1853, p. 1379. Also see Perelman, pp. 15-16.



labour and forced to abandon their previous solidarities, or they had to give way to those with capital.<sup>8</sup>

*The Economist* was particularly perturbed by what it felt was the rural poor's idle nature. They shrunk from the extra exertion modern husbandry demanded; they were content to "rub along without much trouble . . . and they won't stir themselves if they can avoid it," the paper complained. It noted that competition and changes in the mode of conducting business had long ago compelled the traders and shopkeepers of the manufacturing districts to give up the abundant leisure of closing their shops at four o'clock in the afternoon and amusing themselves at ale-house or cricket matches. Now they strove and pushed business with an energy and perseverance at one time not dreamt of as necessary or possible. The paper argued farmers needed to learn from the shopkeepers' productiveness. It warned that though farmers had "shut up at four o'clock" and taken it easy, they would now, under the operation of competition, find out that they had to, and could, "exert themselves with more effect than they ha[d] hitherto done." Though when faced with the prospect of diminished ease, *The Economist* noticed the farmers did not accept the need for more energy without murmur.<sup>9</sup>

In pre-capitalist times, the rural poor had enjoyed a great deal of free time. They maintained many religious holidays and festivals to break up the routine of work and preferred leisure over the small value they could obtain from wage labour. Despite these frequent holidays, they still managed to produce significant surplus. However, as markets evolved, the claims on their labour multiplied and they had to curtail their leisure in order to meet the growing demands of non-producers. *The Economist*, in its urging that the rural poor exert themselves, feared leisure would take precedence over production. It sought to suppress

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<sup>8</sup> Handy, "'Almost Idiotic Wretchedness.'"

<sup>9</sup> "Agricultural Agitation," *The Economist*, October 17, 1846, pp. 1350-1351; "Farming Profits and Statistics," *The Economist*, April 13, 1850, p. 398; "Competition and Progress in Husbandry," *The Economist*, April 19, 1851, pp. 423-424.

any idleness and to lengthen working hours so that they would be forced to work harder and longer, producing more for the market. It did not seem to occur to the paper that the rural poor might be behaving in a perfectly rational manner in preferring leisure to the increased consumption wages would allow.<sup>10</sup>

In addition to their taking it easy, *The Economist* complained that the rural poor were very much the creatures of routine and too content with their situation.<sup>11</sup> It claimed they were generally “too much disposed to cling with unreasoning tenacity” to old methods of farming; they were “apt to become so attached to their accustomed practices, as not to heed the advances and improvements of which such practices [might] be capable.”<sup>12</sup> Routine practices, differing but slightly from those in use centuries before, were considered sufficient for raising agricultural produce. While the better class of capitalist farmers was seeking improvement, the paper argued “it was long a standing reproach against farmers that they followed servilely and unreflectingly the practices of their forefathers, satisfied if they could live, without much hope or effort to improve their condition.”<sup>13</sup> Something like prudent activity needed to be exercised, *The Economist* admonished. The rural poor could not “suppose that the world and society [would] stand still for them; or that they [could] be exempted from the changes which, in the world’s progress, all industrial undertakings seem to be destined to undergo.”<sup>14</sup> The paper repeatedly lamented that the great mass of farmers still consisted of men whose capital was small, whose activity was confined within the narrowest limits, and controlled by the strictest routine. The great want of English agriculture, it maintained, was that men of more intelligence, activity, and capital than the great body of the

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<sup>10</sup> Perelman, pp. 16-18, 41, 210, 306, 339.

<sup>11</sup> “Scientific Agriculture,” *The Economist*, August 26, 1848, pp. 966-968; “What is High Farming?,” *The Economist*, January 20, 1849, p. 65; “Agricultural Distress,” *The Economist*, February 22, 1851, pp. 198-199; “Competition and Progress in Husbandry,” *The Economist*, April 19, 1851, pp. 423-424; “Landowning a Business,” *The Economist*, June 12, 1852, pp. 645-646.

<sup>12</sup> “The Progress of Husbandry in England,” *The Economist*, July 31, 1847, pp. 865-866; “Low Farming Fallacies,” *The Economist*, June 15, 1850, pp. 651-652.

<sup>13</sup> “Agricultural Education,” *The Economist*, January 15, 1848, p. 64.

<sup>14</sup> “Farming Calculations and Estimates,” *The Economist*, November 3, 1849, pp. 1218-1219.

tenant-farmers who currently occupied the soil, should turn their attention to husbandry. It was encouraged that in Lancashire, there were amongst the landowners “new men coming from the towns, bringing with them business experience and active habits which they had acquired in their former occupations.” From such men there was more to be hoped for than from old classes of proprietors.<sup>15</sup>

*The Economist* condemned all behaviour that did not yield a maximum work effort and was clearly frustrated with the rural poor’s lack of desire to improve their situation or increase their wealth. The paper was concerned with increasing their labour because their mentality of leisure, contentedness, and indifference to increased consumption was an affront to efficiency and a threat to capital’s need for greater surpluses and profits. The economy could only prosper through the increased efforts of workers and through gains in efficiency. Thus the advancement of capitalism depended on the rural poor developing “a taste for labour”; it required “drawing forth the force which slumbered in the peasants’ arm,” or else it required forcing the rural poor from the land to make way for those who had capital and habits of industry.<sup>16</sup>

### **Teaching Submission to the Laws of the Market**

*The Economist* was also disturbed by farmers’ protests and demands for protection. Commenting on a gathering of angry farmers in 1850, the paper argued such proceedings were only meant to alarm advocates of free trade; the farmers themselves were amongst the last classes who would gain anything by provoking outrage. It noted that one of the points most insisted on by several speakers, and most applauded by the furious mob, was the assertion that farmers had a right to protection; they did not ask it as a favour, they demanded it. Farmers were resolved, if they could, to dictate laws to the whole community. But, the

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<sup>15</sup> “Landlords on Leases,” *The Economist*, September 18, 1847, pp. 1078-1079; “Agricultural Meetings,” *The Economist*, September 5, 1863, pp. 987-988.

<sup>16</sup> Sir James Steuart, 1767. *An inquiry into the principles of political economy, being an essay on the science of domestic policy in free nations*. Vol. I, pp. 200, 202. Cited in Perelman, p. 156. “The Agricultural Population,” *The Economist*, June 22, 1861, pp. 680-681.

paper pointed out, they intermingled their clamours for protection with denunciations of the tithe system and demands for the landlords to decrease their rents. Such incongruity, it felt, demonstrated that the farmers were really much too angry to be aware of what they were talking about.<sup>17</sup> Of course, the removal of protection and high rents were both intended to restrict small-scale farmers' way of life and force them to work for wages, and thus were really quite congruent. That they rebelled against the needs of capital and did not submit voluntarily to authority was the paper's real worry.

Farmers' rebellion, their insistence that they had a right to live on the land, and their demand for higher prices, *The Economist* felt, set a most pernicious example and was dangerous for the whole community. It accused the farmers of adopting the very worst doctrines of the socialists because they demanded

that from the law which all experience has demonstrated no law can command. The natural increase of population prohibits the attempt of every Legislature to provide employment and wages for all who are born in the land. But the price of corn, the rate of profit on capital, and the rent of land, are all determined by natural laws, as certain and fixed as the relation between population and subsistence. . . . it is mere ignorant socialism to demand that the Legislature shall keep up the price of corn, or maintain rent at a certain height.<sup>18</sup>

The paper remarked that even though protection had been overthrown and it was certain it could not be restored, even though protection "was contrary to justice and opposed to progress," farmers, incredulously, still advocated for protection.<sup>19</sup> It clearly feared their rebellion would inspire others to demand regulations that would further inhibit the workings of the market. For *The Economist*, this was evidence of the farmers' need for strict discipline.

A lack of discipline was also responsible for labourers' criminality, the paper believed. *The Economist* reported on several instances of arson in the countryside, attributing them to

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<sup>17</sup> "Restrictionist Wrath," *The Economist*, May 11, 1850, pp. 509-510.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> "The Protectionists at Drury Lane," *The Economist*, May 3, 1851, pp. 474-475.

labourers' "tendency" and their "numbers."<sup>20</sup> While the paper admitted labourers were miserable and starving and their condition was incompatible with the safety of society, it maintained the most effectual and cheap method to relieve the labouring classes was "to give the people instantly perfectly free trade, and trust to them to provide for themselves." It argued that agricultural improvement and free trade would eventually bring prosperity, though this was a slow process.<sup>21</sup>

Clearly the path to capitalist social relations was not a smooth one. The rural poor, quite rationally, did not willingly accept a new system that was designed to dispossess and subdue them. Thus discipline was needed to force them to submit to authority, and faith was required on their part to believe that they would eventually be brought to prosperity through the market. According to *The Economist*, the rural poor needed to learn to respect and accept the laws of the market, even if those laws happened to impoverish them.<sup>22</sup>

### **Shaking off their Feudal Habits and 'Twaddling Sentimentalism'**

*The Economist* also strongly disapproved of any emotional or dependent ties between landlords and tenants, primarily because such ties interfered with the free play of the market in agriculture. To rely on "customs of the country and a good understanding" between landlord and tenant, the paper argued, made the tenant inappropriately dependent on the landlord. The tie between them was of a semi-feudal character, it complained, the one class looking for, the other affording patronage or protection. The consequence was "to lower the standard of capital and enterprise among farmers and to prevent landowners from regarding their estates simply as property." In fact, these ties were such a problem, *The Economist* claimed, that a man of education, who regarded the hiring of a farm as a merely commercial

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<sup>20</sup> "The Number and Tendency of Public Movements," *The Economist*, May 11, 1844, p. 773. Also see "Letter to the Editor – Incendiarism and Agricultural Labourers," *The Economist*, May 25, 1844, p. 827 in which "Rusticus" refutes popular politicians' and *The Economist's* claims that the destruction of property was due to a "natural inclination in the poor to destroy."

<sup>21</sup> "The Causes and Cure of Incendiarism," *The Economist*, September 21, 1844, p. 1229; "Condition of Agricultural Labourers," *The Economist*, January 10, 1846, pp. 36-37.

<sup>22</sup> Polanyi, p. 85.

contract in which there was no obligation or dependence on the one side or the other, found it extremely difficult to obtain a farm. This feudal-like system also bound labourers as tightly to the soil as ever they were bound. According to the paper, such sentimental ties were the bane of agriculture as an advancing business and needed to be totally shaken off.<sup>23</sup>

In the course of numerous debates on the Corn Laws, the protectionists had argued that the relation between landlord and tenant ought not to be a purely commercial relation. The free traders, on the contrary, had maintained that the relation between landlord and tenant should be a purely commercial relation – that one had only to consider how much he could get, and the other how little he could give, and that both were bound by the advantage which the rest of society conferred on them in the exclusive ownership and use of the soil, to make the land supply as much food at as small a cost as possible.<sup>24</sup> Like the free traders, *The Economist* claimed any mutual confidence between landlords and tenants, generous owners and confiding occupiers, was nonsense, “the mere echo of a departing prejudice.” Accordingly, it argued that the greatest service which could be conferred upon agriculture was to dispossess landlords and tenants of all “twaddling sentimentalism.”<sup>25</sup>

*The Economist* maintained that once the “artificial bond of a common interest” had been destroyed, “the commercial relation could come into full operation.”<sup>26</sup> Within this commercial relation, the paper argued the ‘tie’ the tenant required was a clear, definite, rational, and secure contract for the possession of a farm for so long a period as to enable him

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<sup>23</sup> “Incendiary Fires in the Country,” *The Economist*, January 13, 1844, p. 388; “Tenant Right and Tenant Might,” *The Economist*, June 26, 1847, pp. 726-727; “Practical and Experimental Farming,” *The Economist*, October 28, 1848, p. 1219; “Landlord and Tenant Law,” *The Economist*, June 21, 1851, pp. 675-676; “Dependence of Tenant-Farmers,” *The Economist*, September 2, 1854, p. 955; “Prize Farms and Prize Farmers,” *The Economist*, September 20, 1856, pp. 1038-1039; “Landlords and Tenants,” *The Economist*, January 28, 1860, p. 92.

<sup>24</sup> “Ireland – Landlord’s Rights,” *The Economist*, April 4, 1846, pp. 435-436.

<sup>25</sup> “Relation of Landlord and Tenant,” *The Economist*, June 2, 1849, p. 604; “Agricultural Tendencies – Leases and Culture Stipulations,” *The Economist*, July 5, 1851, pp. 730-731; “Prizes to Agricultural Labourers,” *The Economist*, June 24, 1854, pp. 674-675; “Sentimental Feudalism,” *The Economist*, November 9, 1861, pp. 1238-1239; “Management of Estates – Land Agents,” *The Economist*, April 24, 1858, pp. 450-451.

<sup>26</sup> “The Protectionists and Their Clients,” *The Economist*, February 17, 1849, pp. 171-172; “Progress of Agriculture,” *The Economist*, April 23, 1859, p. 452.

to use his capital to the best advantage.<sup>27</sup> Landlords, on the other hand, could promote the good of their tenantry, district, and the community at large, *The Economist* maintained, by an enlightened pursuit of their own self-interest. Where landlord and tenant relations were strictly confined to the mere terms of a bargain, and where the principle of self-interest prevailed, the improvements in husbandry were the greatest, it claimed.<sup>28</sup> The paper urged landlords to conform to the exigency of the times. They could not “lag in the career of civilization, and expect to reap the gains of those who lead it onward.” Either land should be dealt with on commercial principles or it should go out of cultivation, *The Economist* argued; there was no medium.<sup>29</sup> It noted that the men accustomed to commercial affairs were most likely to adopt a rational method of managing landed property. The paper pointed out that some of the great merchants of Britain who had become landowners generally proved better business managers of landed property than hereditary proprietors. The reasons *The Economist* gave were that merchants were comparatively free from local, family, and class prejudices, they possessed the systematic habits of business, and they had capital.<sup>30</sup>

*The Economist* was advocating for agriculture to become more of a business and less a way of life. Under a business system, the land was to be subordinated to the needs of a rapidly expanding urban population, landlords’ relations with their tenants were to become more distant and exploitative, and capitalist relations of production were to prevail over any other social relations. As the paper argued: “individuals should be freed as much as possible, and as quickly as possible, from any restraints on their actions as individuals. All old claims

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<sup>27</sup> “Commercial Contracts,” *The Economist*, March 29, 1851, pp. 338-339; “Landlord and Tenant Law,” *The Economist*, June 21, 1851, pp. 675-676; “Active Agricultural Capital – Tenant-Rights,” *The Economist*, October 24, 1846, p. 1392; “Prize Farms and Prize Labourers,” *The Economist*, September 20, 1856, pp. 1038-1039.

<sup>28</sup> “Bad Farming and Feudalism,” *The Economist*, February 1, 1851, p. 116; “British and Foreign Husbandry,” *The Economist*, September 29, 1855, pp. 1067-1068; “Patriarchal Landlordism,” *The Economist*, October 16, 1858, pp. 1150-1151.

<sup>29</sup> “Land; Its Uses and Abuses,” *The Economist*, July 11, 1846, pp. 893-895.

<sup>30</sup> “Tenant Right and Tenant Might,” *The Economist*, June 26, 1847, pp. 726-727; “Owning Land and Farming Land,” *The Economist*, March 27, 1858, pp. 338-339.

over the soil, arising from feudal times and interfering with industry should be given up.”<sup>31</sup>

Again, either the rural poor were to adhere to the laws of the market, or they were to give way to those with capital, who understood and followed these laws.

*The Economist* was concerned, too, with the semi-feudal relationship between farmers and local agricultural societies. It was in favour of large agricultural societies such as the *Royal Agricultural Society* and the *Highland Society* which embraced very extensive districts and promoted improvement.<sup>32</sup> Of the 700 or so local societies and farmers’ clubs, however, *The Economist* could not speak favourably. They were so entirely local, so completely dependent on the exertions or patronage of an individual or two, and were mere political engines in the hands of local proprietors, it claimed.<sup>33</sup>

*The Economist* mostly ridiculed these local agricultural societies for offering prizes to labourers for the best work in their respective employments, again primarily because the paper believed they interfered with a rigorous application of market forces. It argued their effect in promoting skill was minimal; nothing really created skill amongst rural labourers but a demand for skilled labour. Prize-giving was just childish interference, the paper claimed; rather, the more they encouraged “genuine individual manliness in labourers, with a higher sense of individual responsibility,” the more likely they would be to obtain the kind of labour that steam-power needed.<sup>34</sup> It maintained these types of prizes belonged to a different phase of social life than that which they had now entered upon. Working men and women were no longer “semi-serfs” but were influenced by the same motives as other classes of the industrious. They could sell their labour to the best markets open to them, and they suffered from their own imprudence and benefited from provident conduct as other classes did.

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<sup>31</sup> “New Means and New Maxims,” *The Economist*, April 22, 1848, pp. 451-452.

<sup>32</sup> “The Agricultural Society’s Meeting,” *The Economist*, July 24, 1847, pp. 837-838; “Farmers’ Clubs and Agricultural Societies,” *The Economist*, June 9, 1855, pp. 620-621.

<sup>33</sup> “Farming in Norfolk,” *The Economist*, July 1, 1848, pp. 736-737; “Sayings at Agricultural Societies,” *The Economist*, October 1, 1859, pp. 1094-1095; “Agricultural Prizes – Stock, Acts of Husbandry, and Labourers,” *The Economist*, September 27, 1862, pp. 1072-1073.

<sup>34</sup> “Agricultural Progress and Wages,” *The Economist*, January 21, 1860, pp. 64-65.



Besides, the paper argued, the best prize a farmer could get was to make money by his business; if the prizes which industry and intelligence applied to husbandry could not stimulate the farmer to farm well, he could never be made a good farmer.<sup>35</sup>

The paper was happy to see these local societies dying out and claimed this demonstrated the growing independence of the working agriculturalist. Farmers were becoming smarter and better ascertained “the absurdity of the tales of foreign competition by which they were once deluded.”<sup>36</sup> *The Economist* was hopeful that the age of passionate protectionist politics was ending and they now seemed to be approaching “a more rational state of things.” It urged for agriculture to be completely removed from the domain of politics as it claimed all the questions now affecting husbandry in Britain were economical; anything unconnected with the economical use of land was detrimental to the progress of agriculture.<sup>37</sup>

*The Economist* was thus clearly arguing for the kind of change discussed most forcefully by Polanyi; for one in which society and all that entailed was bent to the will of the market rather than the reverse. Social relations were to become disembedded from economic relations and the market was to be the motivator of people’s behaviour.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, any work that was not performed for wages was not respectable, and prizes, passionate political ties, or traditional solidarities were hindrances to the free working of the market. An objective attitude was to be the model of behaviour for the modern individual. *The Economist* assumed that people would abide by economic rationality and that all contrary behaviour,

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<sup>35</sup> “Prize Farms and Prize Labourers,” *The Economist*, September 20, 1856, pp. 1038-1039; “New Agricultural Prize List,” *The Economist*, October 16, 1858, p. 1152; “Providence and Prize Labourers – Friendly Societies,” *The Economist*, October 22, 1859, pp. 1178-1179.

<sup>36</sup> “The Waning Associations,” *The Economist*, September 26, 1846, p. 1252; “Agricultural and Protection Societies,” *The Economist*, October 9, 1847, p. 1161; “Rural Manifestations – Agricultural Associations,” *The Economist*, October 9, 1847, pp. 1163-1164.

<sup>37</sup> “The Royal Agricultural Society’s Meeting,” *The Economist*, July 27, 1850, pp. 818-819; “Owning Land and Farming Land,” *The Economist*, October 24, 1857, p. 1179; “Practice and Precept,” *The Economist*, October 9, 1858, p. 1123; “Agricultural Statistics,” *The Economist*, July 19, 1862, pp. 791-793. Also see Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, p. 20.

<sup>38</sup> Polanyi, pp. 71-75.

such as working for prizes, was unnatural or the result of outside interference. But this ‘new phase of social life’ in which people could sell their labour did not arise spontaneously, it required disciplinary actions that would subordinate people to the market and ensure a steadily increasing flow of wage labour.

### **Elevating Their Moral Habits**

In addition to their idleness, rebelliousness, and sentimental ties, *The Economist* felt other degrading habits indicated a need to discipline the rural poor. It argued rural labourers’ standard of comfort was still extremely low; they were not frugal or provident, and drunkenness was a very prevalent failing amongst them.<sup>39</sup> One of the indications of their uncivilized condition which the paper frequently reported on was the social problem of ‘harvest-homes’, which in reality, it claimed, were often rude, rough, noisy drinking bouts by which the conclusion of the harvest was commonly celebrated in the countryside.<sup>40</sup> It discussed the various attempts made to rid rural society of these celebrations: substitutes such as quiet suppers and tea-drinking parties, the promotion of education, and the encouragement of well-regulated and real festivity such as sports, in which all classes could participate.<sup>41</sup> *The Economist* argued harvest homes were attempts to revive the past rather than well-devised efforts to elevate the rural labourers. “They much want elevating, it is true,” remarked the paper, “but by less jaunty, we had almost said childish means than pastimes and fireworks.”<sup>42</sup>

Many letters printed in *The Economist* also complained of labourers’ improper habits and moral degradation. Rev. Mr. Surtees noted that with a population of 1,100 he had only eight children at school above the age of 10 years; nearly every child above six or seven years was employed in field work. He felt they could not allow the labouring population to grow up

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<sup>39</sup> “Agricultural Labourers – Their Condition and Prospects,” *The Economist*, December 6, 1856, pp. 1345-1346.

<sup>40</sup> “The Agricultural Labourers – Harvest Home in Norfolk,” *The Economist*, October 20, 1855, pp. 1151-1152; “Harvest Home – Farmers’ Clubs,” *The Economist*, October 17, 1857, pp. 1151-1152.

<sup>41</sup> “The Labourers in Husbandry,” *The Economist*, October 3, 1846, p. 1288; “The Agricultural Labourers – Harvest Home in Norfolk,” *The Economist*, October 20, 1855, pp. 1151-1152; “Harvest Homes,” *The Economist*, September 18, 1858, p. 1039; “Harvest Homes,” *The Economist*, October 8, 1859, p. 1123.

<sup>42</sup> “Harvest Homes,” *The Economist*, September 18, 1858, p. 1039.

without any taste for intellectual pleasures or else “the whole man became animal, his habits and tastes sensual.” The labouring man’s idea of pleasure became limited to “beer and skittles”, and “his holydays were days of drunkenness.” If he married, his bride was in the “family-way”; he signed his name with a mark; if out of work, he went without any feeling of disgrace; if sick, the parish fed him and the parish doctor attended to him; when aged, the parish supported him; when he died, the parish buried him.<sup>43</sup>

Other letter writers especially lamented over what could be done to put an end to labourers’ drunkenness. *The Economist* replied that there was little to be done except to avoid as much as possible the giving of drink as part of the wages, and to encourage reading and education. It claimed that nothing but thrift and a reasonable abstinence from immediate enjoyment, too generally wanting amongst them, was required to raise the working population in the social scale. While beer and tobacco were certainly temptations which led astray many of the rural working men, the paper felt this merely touched the surface of the matter; there were other causes of rural demoralization such as the miserable condition of housing. Overall, the desire to suppress drunkenness amongst rural workmen, it claimed, called attention to some very entrenched social evils in the rural districts. The paper believed that the evils lay deeper than could be reached by any of the remedies it had seen suggested.<sup>44</sup>

Again, *The Economist* did not seem to take into account that labourers might consider leisure more appealing than a life filled with continuous labour, or that it might be completely rational for labourers to deem celebrations more important than money. Of course, this mentality endangered the advancement of capital and its need for people to work harder and longer, not wasting any time in idle frivolity. Indeed, the deeper evil the paper was concerned with was that labourers’ remained indifferent to the needs of capital and thus interfered with

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<sup>43</sup> “The Agricultural Labourers – Harvest Home in Norfolk,” *The Economist*, October 20, 1855, pp. 1151-1152.

<sup>44</sup> “Prize Labourers,” *The Economist*, November 25, 1854, p. 1291; “Agricultural Meetings and Speeches,” *The Economist*, October 13, 1855, pp. 1122-1123; “The Agricultural Labourers – Harvest Home in Norfolk,” *The Economist*, October 20, 1855, pp. 1151-1152; “Practice and Precept,” *The Economist*, October 9, 1858, p. 1123.

the supply of labour. The paper sought to instill in labourers' different attitudes to life – attitudes that would encourage them to have fewer children, arm them with a capacity for delayed gratification, make them advocates of private property, and turn them into consumers.

Toward the end of 1846, as the decay of the potato crop compelled more than usual attention to the condition of agricultural labourers, *The Economist* began an investigation into “who was to blame for the present condition of the bulk of the population.” It would be difficult to find a more uncompromising expression of individual responsibility than is contained in this series of articles.<sup>45</sup> The paper found that the labourers were really at fault for their own misery and that their unsatisfactory habits were the cause of this misery.

Particularly, *The Economist* felt their selfish indulgences and waste in seasons of prosperity on horse races and beer shops, the freedom they clamourously demanded for themselves, and their senseless strikes and destruction of property were to blame.<sup>46</sup> The paper also chided labourers for their improvidence, negligence, their fondness for spirituous drinks, their vices and crimes, and their ignorance, particularly of the “law of population.” Malthus had argued that there was a ‘natural law of population’ which he described as the pressure of population on resources. The poor’s apparent absence of the middle-class habits of prudence and self-discipline or what Malthus called “moral restraint” resulted in them having too many children. He argued their over-breeding made them poor in the first place and resulted in famine or some sort of disaster because of overpopulation. Moreover, he felt it was unlikely the poor would ever develop middle-class traits except through draconian measures.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, *The Economist* argued that the rural poor’s habits were to blame for their own political and social degradation.

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<sup>45</sup> “Who Should be Blamed?,” *The Economist*, October 17, 1846, p. 1346. Scott Gordon, pp. 480-481.

<sup>46</sup> “Should the Lower Classes be Blamed?,” *The Economist*, October 24, 1846, pp. 1389-1391; “Who is To Blame for the Condition of the People?,” *The Economist*, November 21, 1846, p. 1517.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas Malthus, *An Essay on the Principles of Population or, A View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness*, 1803 (Homewood: R. D. Irwin, 1963). Also see Ross, p. 3.

*The Economist* also held out hope that men could improve themselves – that they could possess property, attain elective franchise in towns, and live in respectable dwellings. It claimed the removal of the Corn Laws, by abolishing “one great artificial barrier erected between man and the course of nature,” would help make all classes better acquainted with the ‘natural’ laws on which the welfare of society depended. *The Economist* argued that free trade had secured to the labouring classes all the raw materials of physical well-being; all that was needed was a “wanting in themselves, the temperance to resist animal indulgence, and knowledge to understand their interest.”<sup>48</sup>

The paper thus portrayed a market system as natural and any barriers to the free working of the market as artificial. Yet the market did not come about spontaneously, it required government interventions to establish and maintain it. Likewise, labourers had to be coerced, by impoverishment and through government measures, to increased labour and frugality. But by laying blame for labourers’ misery on their own failings, *The Economist* could justify their need for discipline and control. In general, it was frustrated with what it perceived was labourers’ misspent time on idleness and pleasure. It was annoyed by their “habitual and general condition in seasons of abundance . . . when other classes ha[d] been yearly increasing in wealth and superfluity.”<sup>49</sup> Labourers needed to adopt the industrious, frugal, and rational approach to life that was such an essential part of the capitalist spirit. *The Economist* pointed to the middle classes as an example to follow; their pride was of successful industry and the dignity of an honest reputation, of strict conformity of dress, appearance and behaviour. Their conversations were filled with discussions of the value of money and the modes of making it. Nothing was more wonderful, the paper remarked, than the busy, industrious pride of the middle classes of London.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> “Should the Lower Classes be Blamed?,” *The Economist*, October 24, 1846, pp. 1389-1391.

<sup>49</sup> “Who Should be Blamed?,” *The Economist*, October 17, 1846, p. 1346.

<sup>50</sup> “Charity or Justice,” *The Economist*, February 17, 1844, p. 485.

*The Economist* also examined the position of capitalists and landowners, and in the end, exonerated them of all responsibility. Capitalists, the paper contended, strove to make the greatest possible profit and by those efforts extended the wealth of society. A capitalist's own wealth, as well, conferred direct benefits to the lower classes, for it provided the capital which was the source of labourers' employment. Landowners, it argued, were merely capitalists who had invested capital in land. They were not to blame for the degradation of the lower classes, as it was clear that if land was not owned and improved, it could not be cultivated successfully. Ownership of land was essential to the very existence of the classes whom the landowners were said to impoverish. Besides, *The Economist* remarked, to be responsible for labourers would mix such "sentimental considerations with the conduct of business."<sup>51</sup>

Subsequently, the paper investigated the state, which, because it assumed to provide for the welfare of the people, made itself unwisely responsible for the happiness of the masses. *The Economist* believed that the effects of legislation led to the general helplessness of the masses which then came to depend on the government instead of themselves. A wise society was one which limited the role of government to the protection of life and property; anything beyond this interfered with the plan of 'natural' progress. Self-interest, the paper maintained, was a universal law of nature, and if the pursuit of self-interest did not lead to general welfare, then no systems of government could accomplish it either.<sup>52</sup>

*The Economist* portrayed the wage relationship as a seemingly voluntary affair – workers needed employment and employers wanted workers. In reality, extensive interventions were required to restrict self-provisioning and force people to work for wages. Foucault argued that the "development and generalization of disciplinary mechanisms"

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<sup>51</sup> "Are the Landowners to Blame?," *The Economist*, November 7, 1846, pp. 1452-1453. See also Scott Gordon, p. 480.

<sup>52</sup> "Is the State to Blame?," *The Economist*, November 14, 1846, pp. 1483-1484; "Who is To Blame for the Condition of the People?," *The Economist*, November 21, 1846, p. 1518. Also see Scott Gordon, p. 481.

accompanied the earlier brutal processes of primitive accumulation. Separating people from the means of subsistence and inducing them to labour was “supported by these tiny, everyday, physical mechanisms, by all those systems of micro-power that are essentially non-egalitarian.”<sup>53</sup> These disciplines provided more of a guarantee of submission to the market, and *The Economist*, in exact contradiction to its supposed principles of laissez faire, eagerly supported them.

### **‘An Education to Give Them That Provident Frugality’**

*The Economist* argued the rural poor would benefit from education, as it believed farmers were “slow to learn from mere example, they require[d] more practical teaching.”<sup>54</sup> The paper indicated that the real object of this education would be to “promote the increased application of capital to husbandry, which [would] raise the wages of agricultural labourers, by augmenting the demand for their services; and, next, by moral and industrial education, to give them that provident frugality.”<sup>55</sup>

*The Economist*’s proposal for a program of rural education included scientific and educational lectures. These types of lectures had been given to town audiences and the paper felt they were a suitable model to be replicated for rural audiences. Though rural labourers’ habits of working separately and silently in the fields, and their “want of social communication,” perhaps made them less ready recipients of verbal instruction than townspeople, the paper argued these peculiarities were “a strong reason for giving them social instruction and so equalizing their fate.” It thought labourers “would profit from occasions to kindle in them a desire of knowledge”; that for them to hear some plainly-written modern history, or some description of the progress of their friends or relations in Australia or the United States, or some notice of the growth of the arts by which they were clothed, would be beneficial. Moreover, they should be encouraged to read newspapers, *The Economist*

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<sup>53</sup> Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, p. 222.

<sup>54</sup> “Land a Commodity,” *The Economist*, June 16, 1849, p. 659 and Perelman, pp. 20, 22.

<sup>55</sup> “Land and Labourers,” *The Economist*, December 5, 1846, p. 1584.

maintained, and other such publications that would tell them what was going on in the world around them. Every effort should be made, the paper believed, to enable labourers to acquire the mechanical parts of education, reading, writing, and arithmetic and such elementary knowledge as could be imparted during the short periods their children could devote to schooling. *The Economist* concluded that the knowledge possessed by other men needed to be disseminated to the rural poor because “it [was] necessary for their welfare and the safety of the State.”<sup>56</sup>

Though the paper argued labourers would profit from increased knowledge, formal education was only part of a wider political process of discipline and instruction. It was not the miserable condition of the rural poor *The Economist* was concerned with, but that they did not feel the depth of their suffering or understand their need for improvement. This mentality, as Foucault argued, endangered the system of capitalism. Education, as a result, was one of the subtle, everyday techniques of government that would encourage the rural poor to abandon any pre-capitalist values and persuade them to adopt middle class aspirations. Education was to change the rural poor’s habits and instill new ways of thinking, making them more accepting of work discipline and teaching them to accept their lot in a capitalist system. By means of education, the rural poor were to be made into modern citizens of well-formed character, with traits of frugality, sobriety, and, above all, industriousness.<sup>57</sup>

### **‘More Commodious Cottages’**

While education was occupying much of the public’s attention, *The Economist* argued nothing more effectually retarded the efforts of educating rural labourers than the degraded state of their habitations. According to the paper, the chief requirement for the improvement

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<sup>56</sup> “Memorable Change,” *The Economist*, October 27, 1855, p. 1176.

<sup>57</sup> Perelman, pp. 188, 192-193, Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, pp. 131-132, and Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, pp. 69-94, 176.



of labourers was a higher standard of personal comfort in their dwellings and social habits.<sup>58</sup>

The paper, therefore, was a strong advocate for a material reconstruction of their homes.

Timothy Mitchell's discussion of colonialism in Egypt provides insight into *The Economist's* interest in building new cottages for labourers. In Egypt, Mitchell explained, the modern colonial state sought to govern the population through more diffuse power which

required mechanisms that were measured rather than excessive and continuous rather than sporadic, working by invigilation and the management of space. Besides schooling and the army, these mechanisms included such civilizing innovations as the supervision of hygiene and health, a military-style system of permanent rural policing, the building of model villages on new, privately-owned agricultural estates . . . At the same time as they were extended, these strategies were to become increasingly unnoticeable.<sup>59</sup>

The rebuilding of villages was thus an inconspicuous, microphysical power; "a power that worked by reordering material space in exact dimensions and acquiring a bodily hold upon its subjects." Mitchell argued that this was a space in which the techniques of government attempted to create appropriate social citizens.<sup>60</sup> *The Economist*, too, felt 'decent' homes would encourage the rural poor to adopt appropriate behaviour.

The paper justified the need for new cottages by referring to an article on cottages in the *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society*, which argued that while labourers had increased, cottage accommodation had diminished due to their standing in the way of farm homesteads, parks, roads, or agricultural improvements. As well, cottages had been pulled down in areas where property was in the hands of a small number of landed proprietors in order to prevent labourers from obtaining settlements.<sup>61</sup> The consequence was that labourers had congregated in villages and the smaller towns where their dwellings were often miserable and expensive. *The Economist* argued this want of cottage accommodation for labourers was

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<sup>58</sup> "Agricultural Meetings and Speeches," *The Economist*, October 13, 1855, pp. 1122-1123.

<sup>59</sup> Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, p. 175.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79, 93-94.

<sup>61</sup> Marx discussed the 'clearing' of cottages and argued they were the last great process of expropriation of the agricultural population from the soil. See pp. 889-890.

a serious concern as miserable dwelling places deteriorated their moral and physical condition.<sup>62</sup>

Others also commented within *The Economist* on the condition of rural labourers' homes. Lord Ashley maintained the cottages in the county of Dorset were "inconveniently small, filthy, and ill-drained"; they were "hotbeds of immorality and disease."<sup>63</sup> Cottages on many estates, according to the Duke of Bedford, were so deficient

as to be inadequate to the removal of that acknowledged obstacle to the improvement of the morals and habits of agricultural labourers, which consist[ed] in a want of separate bed-rooms for grown-up boys and girls; and secondly, that the practice of taking in lodgers had led to still further evils.<sup>64</sup>

*The Economist* went on to describe the Duke's plans for new cottages: they were to built in pairs, five or six yards from the road, leaving a small space for a garden of flowers and herbs. The cottages were to render the occupants as independent of each other as circumstances would permit. A separate entrance was to be made to each cottage and if further separation was desired, it could be accomplished by planting a fence between the cottages and making the water pump with a double handle to work both ways. The entrance door was not to face the road, not only on account of its publicity, but because an indolent tenant was in the habit of throwing ashes and other refuse into a heap immediately before the doorway. In the proposed plan a receptacle would be provided within a short distance of the door, in order to make such a practice unnecessary and inexcusable. The Duke felt that to improve the dwellings of the labouring class, and to afford them the means of greater cleanliness, health, and comfort in their own homes, to extend education, and thus raise their social and moral

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<sup>62</sup> "Lord Ashley and the Dorchester Peasantry," *The Economist*, December 9, 1843, p. 287; "Agricultural Labourers' Cottages," *The Economist*, September 15, 1849, pp. 1022-1023; "Cottage Accommodation – Corporate Landowning," *The Economist*, August 21, 1858, pp. 927-928; "Rural Labourers," *The Economist*, September 4, 1858, pp. 982-983; "The Agricultural Labourer," *The Economist*, January 19, 1861, pp. 62-63.

<sup>63</sup> "Lord Ashley and the Dorchester Peasantry," *The Economist*, December 9, 1843, p. 287.

<sup>64</sup> "Agricultural Labourers' Cottages," *The Economist*, September 15, 1849, pp. 1022-1023.

habits, were among the first duties, and ought to be among the truest pleasures, of every landlord.<sup>65</sup>

The Duke's plans for improved cottages clearly contributed to an appearance of structure and neatness that was important to improvers. But not only did these carefully planned spaces create a sense of order, they also offered better surveillance, knowledge, and control of labourers. By keeping labourers under close supervision on the estates of landlords rather than in nearby villages, greater power could be acquired over the workforce, offering the possibility of increasing their productivity. This abundant labour force constantly needed to be managed and coerced into more effective, constant labour and control over labourers' everyday habits would help to ensure this.<sup>66</sup>

*The Economist* agreed with the Duke, arguing that landlords should promote the well-being of labourers in primarily two ways: first, by letting their farms to tenant farmers on terms that would induce high cultivation, and secondly, by erecting upon their estates a proper number of cottages that they could rent out to labourers. The cottages should be looked upon by the landowner as an expenditure that would benefit his property indirectly, by elevating the character and increasing the comforts of the labourers, and at the same time affording convenience to tenant farmers, the paper maintained. Landowners could perhaps also do something to promote education and provident habits amongst the labouring class, it added.<sup>67</sup> The paper was frustrated, however, that landlords had to be responsible for improvements as labourers did not seem to care about the condition of their cottages. "Comparatively little labour on their own part would remove some of the worst evils of their dwellings, yet they seldom think of making the least exertion for the purpose," the paper complained.<sup>68</sup> *The Economist* felt the same about labourers' lack of inclination for personal cleanliness. A

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<sup>65</sup> "Agricultural Labourers' Cottages," *The Economist*, September 15, 1849, pp. 1022-1023.

<sup>66</sup> Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*, pp. 66-68 and *Colonizing Egypt*, pp. 47, 78-79.

<sup>67</sup> "Agricultural Labourers' Cottages," *The Economist*, September 15, 1849, pp. 1022-1023; "The Royal Agricultural Society's Meeting," *The Economist*, July 27, 1850, pp. 818-819.

<sup>68</sup> "The Agricultural Labourers," *The Economist*, November 24, 1849, pp. 1304-1306.

knowledge of the true value and enjoyment of a clean skin was absent among them. It argued their lack of cleanliness could only be corrected by training the young to improved habits, and it believed this should be an essential part of the discipline of rural schools.<sup>69</sup>

*The Economist* further proposed that every farm should be furnished with a certain number of decent cottages, let with the farm, in which the chief permanent workmen could reside. The best plan, according to the paper, was to lodge single men with some steady and married labourer whose cottage was suitable; a single man would never be so well off or so likely to conduct himself well as where he lodged with a respectable married man of his own class.<sup>70</sup>

Within this language of improvement resided strategies of order that, like the Duke's plan, provided better control over labour. But decent cottages were also meant to improve and control character. Indeed, *The Economist's* concern was aimed less at the health and comfort of the labouring classes than at constructing appropriate morality. For instance, Ian Hacking argued separate sleeping quarters for parents and children were important to the codification of the rules of the nuclear family. Thus the reconstruction of homes was a power that worked not only upon the exterior of the body but also 'from the inside out', by shaping morality.<sup>71</sup>

*The Economist* proposed that in addition to letting cottages with a farm, a certain proportion of cottages should be let directly by the landowner to the labouring man who would thus be able to serve sometimes one farmer and sometimes another without having to move from his cottage. These cottages, it argued, should be let to "the most steady and intelligent labourers, and their occupation of them should be deemed an object of desire among the working population." Such cottages could, therefore, be built according to a

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<sup>69</sup> "The Agricultural Labourers," *The Economist*, November 24, 1849, pp. 1304-1306; "Prize Farming," *The Economist*, September 19, 1857, p. 1039.

<sup>70</sup> "Lodging Agricultural Labourers," *The Economist*, May 23, 1857, p. 562.

<sup>71</sup> Hacking, pp. 119-120 and Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt*, pp. 94, 175-176.

somewhat higher standard, and be furnished with better conveniences. “The possession of a superior dwelling [was], undoubtedly, one of the means of elevating a labouring man, and, perhaps, even more, his family.”<sup>72</sup>

Yet the paper seemed to fear making labourers too comfortable; it was concerned that their homes were of just the right size and construction, otherwise, they would not accomplish the purpose of controlling the labour and habits of labourers. *The Economist* remarked that large dwellings were really not required by agricultural workmen who were constantly out of doors and absent from home during the day. Besides, too large a house was sure to lead to taking in lodgers or using the space for fuel and the like, which was undesirable. The attempt at improvement would be nearly useless if the cottages were made too well – if they went “so far beyond the notions of convenience entertained by the classes who occup[ied] them.” The paper noted that in a report of *The Association for Promoting Improvement in the Dwellings and Domestic Condition of Agricultural Labourers in Scotland*, it was revealed that the habits of the people prevented their appreciating such cottages. “In many parts of Scotland . . . having erected a few superior two-storied cottages, the peasantry will seek the most wretched hovels rather than sleep upstairs; and I have had these cottages standing empty on account of this for years,” Lord Kinnaird reported.<sup>73</sup> This was evidence that labourers’ could, and often did, thwart attempts to turn them into appropriate citizens, but *The Economist* argued all this proved was that the most landlords could do was to provide plain and comfortable cottages; beyond this improvement, money would be thrown away. It was so difficult to improve the habits of any class by external effort, the paper lamented, yet if landowners provided a sufficient number of cottages with convenience fully up to the requirements of the labourers, but not much beyond them, they would have done as much to improve the social condition of

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<sup>72</sup> “Agricultural Labourers’ Cottages,” *The Economist*, September 15, 1849, pp. 1022-1023.

<sup>73</sup> “Cottage Improvement,” *The Economist*, May 24, 1856, p. 565.

the labourers as they would be able to accomplish by direct effort.<sup>74</sup> *The Economist* did not expect improvements of the moral, mental, and physical condition of rural labourers to be produced by creating an exaggerated notion of what the dwelling place of the farming man ought to be. “We look to increased employment, and its consequence, better wages, as the main element of that improvement, and the effect will be, first, a desire for better food and clothing, and, next, for a more commodious cottage.”<sup>75</sup>

*The Economist* praised Lord Radnor – one of the first financiers of the newspaper and a fervent opponent of garden allotments for labourers – for making great changes on and near his estate through high farming and new buildings. The work that had been provided, the wages which had been paid, the habits of neatness and carefulness, and the honourable pride men had who were employed on or associated with such works, made them better servants and better members of the community, *The Economist* claimed. By Lord Radnor’s influence and means, a nearby village had gone from a disreputable village, to one that challenged competition with any in the country. The population, once dissolute and disorderly, was now respectable and contented; once half-employed and ill-paid, was now in constant work; dirt and destitution had disappeared and been succeeded by cleanliness and comfort. As great a change had taken place in villagers’ abodes; the old, dark, dismal, unventilated cottages had given place to neat, roomy, well-constructed dwellings, each with every convenience and with every requisite for decency, according to the size of the families. There was also an excellent school for their children, *The Economist* noted.<sup>76</sup>

In all, though the paper claimed it was concerned with labourers’ well-being and health, a reconstruction of their cottages was a means of changing their social and moral habits and maintaining labour discipline. “Decent” homes were another one of the subtle,

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<sup>74</sup> “Cottage Improvement,” *The Economist*, May 24, 1856, p. 565; “The Agricultural Labourers,” *The Economist*, August 29, 1846, pp. 1126-1127; “Condition and Education of Rural Labourers,” *The Economist*, December 19, 1857, pp. 1401-1402.

<sup>75</sup> “The Agricultural Labourers,” *The Economist*, November 24, 1849, pp. 1304-1306.

<sup>76</sup> “Lord Radnor’s New Farm Buildings,” *The Economist*, July 16, 1853, pp. 789-790.

physical, disciplinary mechanisms Foucault described, a means to creating acceptable social citizens.

### **A Strict Administration of the Poor Law**

Perhaps there was no better way to force labourers into increased employment and regular wages than through a strict administration of the Poor Law. Beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, as a form of control directed especially against the great numbers of poor who had been displaced by enclosures, the British Parliament established a state-regulated ‘welfare’ program known as the parish Poor Laws. A component of these laws was the 1662 Law of Settlement which gave responsibility of the poor to the parish in which they resided. By 1795, a destitute person had the right to ‘outdoor’ relief even if he had employment, as long as his wages amounted to less than the family income granted to him by the Poor Law scale, but only in his parish; a parish took no responsibility for those without settlement there.<sup>77</sup> Thus the Law of Settlement and the Poor Law did a number of things *The Economist* believed to be pernicious: it established people’s right to poor relief and prevented the mobility of labour and the establishment of a competitive labour market.

The rates of poor relief soared in the 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries as the rural poor were cleared off the land to make way for capital. There was also a hardening of public attitudes toward the poor. Arthur Young articulated changing beliefs toward the poor when he claimed that “everyone but an idiot knows that the lower classes must be kept poor or they will never be industrious.”<sup>78</sup> Changing attitudes toward the poor were perhaps demonstrated best by Malthus. He argued the misery of those relying on poor relief arose from their own idleness, improvidence, and prolific reproductive habits. Only hunger would spur the poor on to labour, he believed. As debates over the Poor Laws increasingly focused upon the balance

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<sup>77</sup> See Polanyi, pp. 77-85, Porter, pp. 376-378, Post, pp. 183-186 and Ross, p. 11.

<sup>78</sup> Arthur Young, *The Farmer’s Tour through the East of England* (1771), vol. 4, p. 361. Also cited in Porter, p. 377.

– or, rather, the newly feared imbalance – between wealth and the population rate, Malthus’ claims became prominent.

In an essay entitled *An Essay on the Principles of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society*, first published in 1798, Malthus maintained that food supplies increased arithmetically (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) while population, when unchecked, leapt geometrically (2, 4, 8, 16, etc.). The implication of this simple math was that human reproduction, as it outran the supply of food, would doom mankind to misery unless there were “positive” checks of famine or war, or “preventative” checks of moral restraint and delayed marriage.<sup>79</sup> Essentially, Malthus maintained that nature, or the market, determined success and failure, wealth and poverty, and, therefore, such matters were not for state regulation but for individual responsibility. He explained:

A man . . . if he cannot get subsistence from his parents . . . and, if the society do not want his labour, has no claim of right to the smallest portion of food, and, in fact, has no business to be where he is. At nature’s mighty feast there is no vacant cover for him.<sup>80</sup>

Malthus was not concerned about a general population increase; rather, he was concerned with the proliferate habits of the poor, especially given their rights to relief through the Poor Laws. These rights were dangerous, he argued, because they increased poverty and idleness and took away motives for sexual prudence, but also because they tied the poor to the parish, preventing the free circulation of labour. Malthus, in fact, contemplated an end to poor relief entirely. By removing the Poor Laws, without replacing it with any other legislation, the

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<sup>79</sup> Malthus made his argument throughout several editions of his essay. His first edition was called *An Essay on the Principles of Population as it Affects the Future Improvement of Society, with Remarks on the Speculations of Mr. Godwin, M. Condorcet, and Other Writers* (London: printed for J. Johnson, 1798). In his second, 1803 edition, *An Essay on the Principles of Population or, A View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness, with an Inquiry into our Prospects Respecting its Future Removal or Mitigation of the Evils which it Occasions* (Homewood: R. D. Irwin, 1963) he addressed potential checks on population.

<sup>80</sup> Malthus, *An Essay on the Principles of Population or, A View of its Past and Present Effects on Human Happiness*, 1803 (Homewood: R. D. Irwin, 1963).



market would be given charge of the poor. If they found no work, or their work did not provide a living wage, they were 'surplus' population with no right to live.<sup>81</sup>

*The Economist* adopted a stance only slightly less callous than that proposed by Malthus.<sup>82</sup> For example, in response to demands that the poor rates be raised to a living wage in Ireland, the paper replied that:

to pay them not what their labour is worth, not what their labour can be purchased for, but what is sufficient for comfortable subsistence for themselves and family. . . . Do they not see that to do this would be to stimulate every man to marry and to populate as fast as he could, like a rabbit in a warren – in other words, that to apply this to Ireland would be to give brandy to a man who was lying dead drunk in a ditch?<sup>83</sup>

To discourage such behaviours it stipulated that wages, or the poor rates, should be kept low so that the poor would have to spend nearly all their time working just to remain alive.

*The Economist* was particularly opposed to the Law of Settlement as it confined the rural labourer to his own parish. The paper claimed it was plainly adverse to the interest of the labourer to be confined by a parochial settlement that interfered with the free circulation of labour, which, in a 'natural' state of things, would take place in the rural districts. The Law of Settlement prevented a labourer from seeking employment where employment was most plentiful. As such, it was directly at variance, it claimed, with the principle it supported – that "of putting the right man in the right place, or allowing him to find the right place for

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<sup>81</sup> See Porter, pp. 379-381 for a discussion on Malthus. Also see Handy, "'Almost Idiotic Wretchedness,'" John Avery, *Progress, Poverty and Population: Re-reading Condorcet, Godwin and Malthus* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1997) and Ross.

<sup>82</sup> While *The Economist* reiterated much of Malthus' argument, it also wavered in its position. For example, in one article the paper did not agree that population would outstrip the food supply in the near future. It argued that the sufficiency limitation could be overcome because improvement would increase the productivity of land to provide enough food for all. As the paper maintained: "this is so distant and speculative a period, that for all purposes in the present infant condition of the world its consideration cannot enter into any system of practical government. . . . and that it is only where protective laws step in and prevent that improvement which would otherwise take place, that increased abundance does not ensue. . . . With a perfect free trade, and the resources of the mind untrammelled, an increase of population will only be a source of increased wealth and security, and certainly not a cause of anxiety, as it is at this time." In "Change in the Relative Prices of Food and Clothing," *The Economist*, June 14, 1845, p. 552. Scott Gordon argued that *The Economist* accepted Malthusianism in its early issues, then rejected it, then returned to the Malthusian position again in the late 1850's. Scott Gordon, p. 475.

<sup>83</sup> "The Puzzle of Ireland," *The Economist*, October 10, 1846, pp. 1315-1317.

himself.”<sup>84</sup> What the paper was really opposed to was the fact that the Law of Settlement threatened the advancement of capitalism which relied on a shift of labour from rural areas to manufacturing.

For *The Economist*, the Poor Laws and the Law of Settlement also kept the rural poor from developing the habits of self-reliance, industriousness, and forethought that were needed in a capitalist system. The want of frugality and of means of advancing their personal comfort was “the great rock in the course” of rural labourers, the paper claimed. They were unwilling to forego a present advantage or enjoyment for an ultimate benefit. In too many cases, the large wages earned during the harvest would only afford the workmen more beer and the like, and probably leave them in the winter quite as poor as if they had not earned extra wages; then they resorted to relief afforded by the Poor Law. It seldom happened that a poor man or family, “having once tasted the unearned bread supplied by the Poor Law,” could completely recover self-dependence.<sup>85</sup>

The Poor Laws and Law of Settlement, the paper added, interfered with the progress of education and increased pauperism, with its usual companions, crime and disease. This could be avoided, it argued, by imposing restrictions on relief and eventually affording relief only in such extreme cases and under conditions so stringent, that such relief would cease to be regarded by the working classes as an element in their calculations for the future. The new Poor Law of 1834, which abolished outdoor relief in order to encourage mobility of labour and repealed the Law of Settlement, though not completely, accomplished this to some extent, the paper admitted.<sup>86</sup> Still, *The Economist* felt the slightest possibility of relying on poor relief operated most injuriously on the habits of the agricultural population.<sup>87</sup> A strict

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<sup>84</sup> “Is There a Surplus of Labour? Agricultural Wages,” *The Economist*, May 4, 1850, pp. 481-482.

<sup>85</sup> “The Condition of Rural Labourers,” *The Economist*, June 11, 1859, pp. 648-649; “Dwellings of the Rural Labourers,” *The Economist*, September 3, 1859, p. 982.

<sup>86</sup> Handy, *The Menace of Progress*, Ch. 2.

<sup>87</sup> “Agricultural Labourers,” *The Economist*, June 25, 1859, pp. 703-704; “Dwellings of the Rural Labourers,” *The Economist*, September 3, 1859, p. 982.

administration of the Poor Law was, therefore, a disciplinary mechanism to force the rural poor to increased labour, to 'free' labour from its local attachments, to form industrious habits and self-reliance, and ultimately create 'good' citizens.

The paper maintained that the agricultural districts had long been breeding-places for paupers; from them pauperism overflowed to the towns, and there, to a considerable extent, it was extinguished. There could be no doubt that the spur of necessity was sharp as people increased, and wherever that was felt, as it was felt where competition was keenest, improvement necessarily ensued. Quoting Mr. Pashley, who had examined pauperism in various countries, the paper claimed: "it has been in cities that all great movements tending towards civilization seem to have originated." In the end, *The Economist* was convinced that there was hope for the improvement of the rural poor only when they ceased being rural.<sup>88</sup>

Though the intent was that society be re-ordered to allow the market to function freely, the rural poor resisted subordinating all aspects of their lives to a market system. They demonstrated "counter-conduct" to the market system in their preference for leisure and celebrations, in their pre-capitalist social relations, and demand for rights and protection for their way of life. The fact that the rural poor relied on relief, or during harvest home celebrations did as they wished with the money allowed them, was well illustrated by *The Economist's* descriptions of their idleness, drunkenness, and improvidence. The main obstacle to a free working of the market was the rural poor's ignorance of their duties in a market economy: they did not take easily to the exertion modern husbandry required and were 'tightly bound' to the soil. It was the ignorance of their duties, and of the necessity of those duties, which made for their insubordination and inspired the 'arrogance' of their demands. As well, the rural poor's indifference to improving their own well-being and their incapability of recognizing their suffering represented a refusal of the perpetual expansion of needs and

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<sup>88</sup> "Pauperism of Agricultural and Manufacturing Districts," *The Economist*, April 17, 1852, pp. 421-422.

illustrated the difficulty of using need as an instrument of social integration. In all, the rural poor's different forms of conduct confronted the project of social order and progress. Their different behaviours were not compatible with capitalist relations and made them difficult to incorporate as citizens; therefore, they were made the objects of discipline and control.<sup>89</sup>

Although *The Economist* theoretically championed laissez faire, it supported the techniques of government that would work to create social citizens. It advocated education to prepare the rural poor from a young age to have good habits and to spread fundamental notions of participation in the social order. It promoted reconstructed cottages to act as forms of surveillance and control and to create appropriate morality, and a strict administration of the Poor Law to discipline the rural poor to constant labour. Ignorant of their duties and needs, the rural poor needed systematic intervention in order to be integrated into the social order.<sup>90</sup> This reality exposes *The Economist's* basic contradiction: that a market economy did not come about through self-evident laws of nature; rather, the conditions for a market economy needed to be imposed through government power.

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<sup>89</sup> Procacci, "Social economy and the government of poverty," in *The Foucault Effect*, pp. 159-160.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 153-155, 161-167.

## CONCLUSION

The early *Economist*'s narrative of capitalist development in the English countryside was based on an 18<sup>th</sup> century Enlightenment idea of improvement that meant clearing away customs and traditions which constrained profit. It was the rural poor who most obviously held onto old customs and practices; *The Economist*'s campaign for improvement, therefore, constituted an attack on them.

As an advocate of laissez faire, the paper's whole philosophy hinged on the idea that the dominance of the market was a natural outcome which would occur as soon as artificial political barriers were removed. The paper claimed that market forces would naturally bring about the vast changes in the countryside that were needed for Britain's progress. Yet in direct contradiction to its claim, the paper advocated for government policies that would deprive the rural poor of the means of subsistence and coerce them into wage labour. It was the process of separating people from self-provisioning and disciplining them to the market that Marx described as 'primitive accumulation'.

*The Economist* could, in part, portray changes in the countryside as natural because it had benefited from earlier methods of primitive accumulation. Marx claimed there were different moments of primitive accumulation and that at times its methods depended on brute force. Draconian methods were used from the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in Britain to clear the rural poor from the land and force them into accepting the discipline necessary for a system of wage labour. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the process of primitive accumulation was furthered by the expropriation of land as well as by multiple, often more subtle, forms of technological repressions and disciplinary mechanisms. Marx argued the history of the rural poor's expropriation was "written in the annals of mankind in letters of blood and fire."<sup>1</sup> He maintained all methods of primitive accumulation employed the power of the state "to hasten

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, p. 875.

. . . the process of transformation of the feudal mode of production into the capitalist mode, and to shorten the transition.”<sup>2</sup>

*The Economist* played an essential role in advocating for policies that furthered the process of primitive accumulation and secured capitalist relations of production. The paper justified the growth of cities and encouraged the transfer of labour and wealth from the countryside to urban areas. It threw its support behind the final campaigns for enclosure of common land and advocated the deforestation of waste lands. It also argued scientific agriculture and a reformed private property regime were necessary for Britain’s progress. *The Economist* maintained these changes were natural as society advanced and beneficial for everyone by relieving the countryside of paupers and dramatically increasing agricultural productivity. In reality, these were methods of primitive accumulation that dispossessed and impoverished the rural poor and increased inequality. Nor were these changes natural; state force was required to enclose land, shift capital to manufacturing, and open overseas markets. In its push for the collection of agricultural statistics, *The Economist* advocated that the state employ police methods and criminalize dissent in order to open the countryside to capitalist investment and foster the spread of capitalist relations of production. The fact that farmers feared and resisted the changes *The Economist* advocated was evidence of repression.

*The Economist* passionately promoted a system of farming that would also further primitive accumulation. High farming relied on free trade in agriculture, imports of fertilizer, mechanization, large landholdings, and significant amounts of capital. This system of farming was clearly designed to dispossess those who lacked the means to farm highly. It limited access to land and reserved it for those with capital, yet the paper claimed that high farming and large farms came about naturally and ultimately benefited the rural poor. On the contrary, high farming increased class divisions in the countryside, dispossessed the rural

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<sup>2</sup> Marx, pp. 915-916.

poor of land, drove less skilled labour to the cities, and made them dependent on the market for their daily needs. Those alarmed by the effects of free trade and the condition of rural labourers called for measures that would reduce their suffering. In its desire to cement capitalist relations of production, *The Economist* worked to convince those who read the paper to stand firm and not give in to any feelings of sympathy they might have for the rural poor. The paper vigorously argued against a return to agricultural protection, denounced any scheme of assistance to farmers, and vehemently opposed any return to self-provisioning or any attempt to ameliorate poverty using measures it felt were inconsistent with the principles of political economy. This was clearly not the working of market forces, but the intervention of the state through deliberate policies designed to restrict the rural poor's ability to provide for their own needs.

*The Economist* was concerned with the creation of a labour force that was disciplined to the market and a society that was re-ordered so as to allow the market to function, but was unwilling to trust market forces to accomplish this. Rather, the paper depended on methods of discipline, surveillance, and control. It promoted techniques of government – particularly education, decent homes, and a strict administration of the Poor Laws – that would work to change the behaviour of the rural poor. Although the paper argued the rural poor would ultimately benefit from education, reconstructed homes, and very limited access to poor relief, these were methods of primitive accumulation that would remove their last right to subsistence and control their labour. Based on a long-held belief that the poor were dangerous and needed to be controlled, and on its desire to secure capitalist relations of production, *The Economist* sought to suppress the rural poor's ability to promote alternative claims, visions, or forms of behaviour that were not amenable to capitalist relations and ensure they had no alternative to wage labour.

Thus far from doing away with state intervention, the need for control, regulation, and intervention increased in range. The heavy hand of the state was needed to enclose land, secure overseas markets, collect statistics, form a free trade in agriculture, create ‘good’ citizens and, in general, impose a system that was rejected by large numbers of people. As the rural poor promoted ‘counter-conduct’ that challenged the dominance of the market, policies were needed to ensure that traditional solidarities, habits of leisure, or garden allotments did not interfere with the free working of the market. *The Economist*, whose whole philosophy demanded the restriction of state activities, had to entrust the state with the powers and instruments required for the establishment and maintenance of a self-regulating market.<sup>3</sup>

Yet *The Economist*, like its idol Adam Smith who helped construct the idea of ‘the self-regulating market’, continually championed free reign for market forces while obscuring the government pressure and compulsion required for such reign.<sup>4</sup> Michael Perelman, in *The Invention of Capitalism*, pointed out that the work of Adam Smith and other classical political economists has been interpreted by many as pure economic theory. They created a powerful discourse, still influential today, that explained the origin, logic, and ‘rightness’ of capitalism. But, he maintained, the classical political economists appeared to have intentionally obscured, or remained silent about, the government pressure needed to separate the rural poor from the means of subsistence in order to avoid the challenge primitive accumulation posed for their claim that market forces organized production. By doing so, they portrayed capitalism as an essentially benign process and created the impression of “a humanitarian heritage of political economy.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Polanyi, pp. 140-141.

<sup>4</sup> Handy, *The Menace of Progress*, Ch. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Timothy Mitchell, “Dreamland,” in *Evil Paradises: Dreamworlds of Neoliberalism*, eds. Mike Davis and Daniel Bertrand Monk (New York: The New Press, 2007), p. 28 and Perelman, pp. 2-3, 8-11.



*The Economist* also contributed to the impression of a humanitarian political economy by continually recasting the harsh reality of capitalist development in the English countryside in as favourable a light as possible. It made an unnatural system seem natural, wanting us to believe that a market economy came about through an inevitable, voluntary process that was beneficial for all. It repeatedly justified and legitimized policies that furthered primitive accumulation. This position was necessary to secure support for capitalism; it made the magnitude of the sufferings that were to be inflicted on the rural poor, the huge increases in social inequality, the harsh methods of discipline and control, and other injustices that were fundamental to the development and advancement of capitalism more palatable.<sup>6</sup> Because *The Economist's* most important task was to spread faith in capitalism by making its inequality and poverty more acceptable, it was (and is) one of the most dangerous newspapers in the world.

*The Economist* contributed to the ideological environment out of which British industrial capitalism emerged and the views it espoused became pervasively woven into modern thought, influencing agricultural and economic development policy around the world.<sup>7</sup> Its account of England's progress has been the progenitor of much of what has happened in the rest of the world; indeed, it has become the main concern of nearly all countries to achieve economic growth and increase their national wealth. Most often, the rural poor's self-provisioning and indifference to wage labour are seen as obstacles to this project of progress and social order.

As improvement, now understood as development, continues in much of the so-called developing world, we have an obligation to scrutinize *The Economist's* falsification of the historical relation between labour and capital. This thesis contributes to a better understanding of the processes and relationships of power by which people were integrated

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<sup>6</sup> Perelman, pp. 94, 174, 369-370.

<sup>7</sup> Handy, "'Almost Idiotic Wretchedness.'"

into the market. It also disputes the idea that high agriculture was as productive or as successful as has been suggested and questions the wisdom of replicating such a model. As well, it allows us to reject the paper's claims that inequality based on the domination of the means of production by capital was some inherent, natural, or necessary state; rather, this thesis demonstrates that this particular type of inequality developed out of an actual historical experience, identified most clearly by Marx who detailed the brutality of separating people from the means of production. Since scientific agriculture based on the dispossession of the peasantry and the need to collect 'wealth into heaps and population into dense masses', and, indeed, capitalism was not inevitable but the result of particular policies, we can challenge it and work toward envisioning alternative ways to live and produce.

Despite all evidence that the free working of the market required government force and coercion, many continue to believe in and uphold the idea of laissez faire. Belief did not arise spontaneously, but took shape collectively in the course of history through the efforts of proponents of laissez faire.<sup>8</sup> *The Economist* may have been (and may still be) one of the most effective and sophisticated proponents of laissez faire. It contributed to shaping and spreading belief partly because of how it conveyed its arguments in a scientific and objective style. It was also influential because of who read *The Economist*, mainly men of business and governmental officials who signed the free trade petition of 1845, formulated policies, and passed laws.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the newspaper's early editors had close ties to the British Parliament, which throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century consolidated the interests of the middle and industrial classes.

Many people acknowledged the significant role *The Economist* played in shaping and spreading belief in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Economist Frederic Bastiat claimed in 1846 that "there never was a periodical work in which all the questions of political economy were treated with

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<sup>8</sup> Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: from Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books, 1997), p. 24.

<sup>9</sup> Scott Gordon, p. 487.

so much depth and impartiality.”<sup>10</sup> Another supporter of *The Economist* declared that “from its talent and efficiency as an advocate of Free Trade . . . it has already done much towards removing the prejudice and ignorance which at present oppose themselves to a more liberal commercial system.”<sup>11</sup> Walter Bagehot, *The Economist*’s most famous editor, wrote on James Wilson’s death in 1860: “We may observe that through the pages of this journal certain doctrines, whether true or false, have been diffused, far more widely than they ever were in England before – far more widely than from their somewhat abstract nature we could expect them to be diffused.”<sup>12</sup> For nearly a century and half since, *The Economist* has continued to diffuse the doctrine of economic liberalism around the world.

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<sup>10</sup> “To the Free Traders of Great Britain,” *The Economist*, August 8, 1846, p. 1047.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Scott Gordon, p. 488.

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